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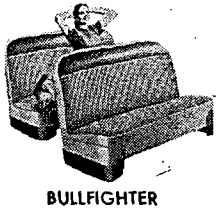

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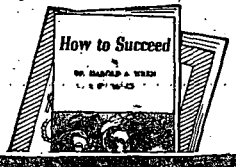

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VOL. XLI, NO. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION FEBRUARY, 1953

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A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

IN CASE you haven't heard, it is now believed that the galaxy or spiral nebula to which our solar system belongs is very much larger than formerly supposed. If you are a bear for figures, the diameter of the galaxy is now estimated at a mere 800,000,000,000,000,000 miles—that's 800 million billion. Light, traveling at the speed of 186,000 miles a second, takes 100,000 years to cross it.

Personally, we find it dizzying to visualize 100,000, much less 100,000 years of 186,000 miles a second speed. However, we tossed the mileage in just in case you were beginning to feel cramped in your little old galaxy.

Horizon to Horizon

Incidentally, have you ever seen it? The galaxy? Step outside any clear night and have a look at the Milky Way, a misty broad band of stars stretching from horizon to horizon. This is not Earth's personal garland, as the Sioux and the Ojibways thought. It is the outer rim of our huge spiral nebula, shaped like a pocket watch and spinning at a goodly rate. Our entire solar system: sun, planets and all, are an infinitesimal speck on this outer rim of the wheel, going around the center at the respectable speed of 150 miles a second. At this speed it will take us 200,000,000 years to make a complete circuit of the celestial merry-go-round.

Under these circumstances, science-fiction's greatest gift to Science (with the capital S) may well turn out to be an imaginative little gimmick known variously as "ultra-drive," "overdrive" or "hyper-spatial drive." These are interchangeable names for a fictional method (to-date) of driving a space ship faster than Mr. Einstein's well-known limiting speed of light. It is obvious that with these awesome distances to cross, even at the speed of light you would be very old and gray before you had gotten well started towards a respectable star cluster.

The change in size estimate of the Milky Way comes from the observations of Dr. Harlow Shapley and Ann B. Hearn of Harvard, who have mapped a corona of stars about 400 million billion miles in radius surrounding the spiral nebula proper. This extends the hitherto accepted radius of the galaxy far out from its previous 50,000 light years. More than a dozen stars are in the area beyond 50,000, several are around the 60,000 mark and at least one is at 65,000 light years.

The Method's Tricky

If you are curious about the method used in estimating these incredible distances, it is a tricky one. There are a number of stars in the corona called Cepheids, whose characteristic is that they vary regularly in brightness. They are located in such constellations as Taurus, Auriga, Perseus and Orion. The dimming and brightening takes place rather quickly, often in less than a day and the shorter the alternating period the dimmer is the all-over candlepower of the particular star. Once a table of luminosities was worked out, it was possible to estimate the distance of the star from its ratio of brightness.

With the naked eye we can see about 6000 stars, not even a handful compared with the hundred billion which make up our galaxy. In addition to definite stars there are also tremendous clouds of gas and dust, some of which are luminous and some of which are dark. These latter are the "coal sacks" of space which block off the stars behind them and give some science fiction writers ideas for stories about "holes in space" or "energy-drinking, black nebulae" and so on.

(Continued on page 129)

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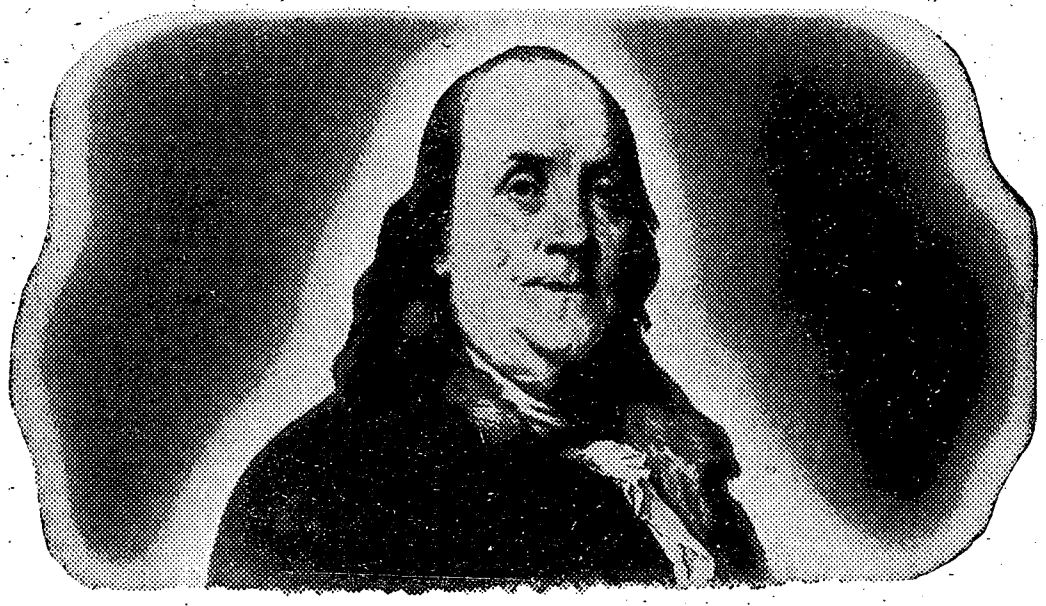
WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

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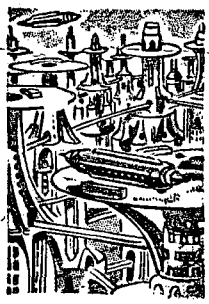
What's New in Science?



PSYCHOSOMATIC MEDICINE, the very latest in man's treatment of his ills, teams up with one of the oldest therapeutic agents known—the hot bath. According to Drs. Kornbluth and Piersol of the University of Pennsylvania's Medical School, giving yourself a good soak in a hot bath is still one of the dandiest setter-uppers you can manage. Furthermore, no prescription is needed and the ingredients are almost free. The benefits derived explain the persistence of mineral springs and spas all over the world, where the hot bath is a ritual and a ceremony. Psychosomatic physicians are using spas more and more as settings for treatment, feeling that the help they get from the baths is invaluable.

IF YOUR WALLET IS FLAT you are more apt to become schizophrenic than plain old neurotic. Schizophrenia is a luxury of the poor. The rich are apt to have other types of neuroses but schizophrenia increases in direct ratio to the poverty of the people involved.

STARS CONTINUE TO GROW steadily, since they pick up dust as gas and stray hydrogen as they spin through space. So instead of suns burning out as commonly supposed, they may be replenishing themselves all the time, with their intake even surpressing their output. In the case of double stars it has been noted that they naturally get closer together as they get larger. They undoubtedly began as small, rather widely separated stars, but with their increase in mass their gravities pull them together until sooner or later they strike and fuse into one.

TINY DROPS OF WATER in the sky, too small to be seen by the naked eye, register on radar screens and may be another explanation of the flying saucer reports. Clouds of such tiny drops are invisible from the ground, but are picked up by radar and also reflect light from the ground. Temperature inversions at the same time cause reflections so that objects on the ground seem to be in the sky. The combination has caused many an airfield to send up planes whose pilots could discover nothing in the air, while reports of flying saucers were coming in.

CRACKPOTS BOTHERING YOU? Here's advice for handling people you suspect may become violent. Don't argue. He may have a persecution complex and the moment you disagree or try to talk him out of his obsession, he may decide you are conspiring against him. Agree, go along so far as you can.

Give him your attention, appear to be listening attentively. No matter how crazy his ideas are, they seem logical to him and if you do not pay attention you will excite him. Besides, if you listen carefully you may learn more about him and so be prepared to give information when or if it is needed.

If he has a grievance, real or fancied, treat it respectfully, urge him to report to the proper authorities who might be able to act upon his complaint.

Do not show fright, do not make him think you might attack him or make a break for safety—this might lead him to an attack on you in what appears to him to be self-protection.

Unless he does make an overt act, the police cannot usually help you, so it is better to avoid arousing him than to call for help. Threatening letters, however, are another story. The writer of threatening letters can be prosecuted as a Federal offender. Threatening letters should be turned over to the Post Office or the F.B.I.

—Lewis Island

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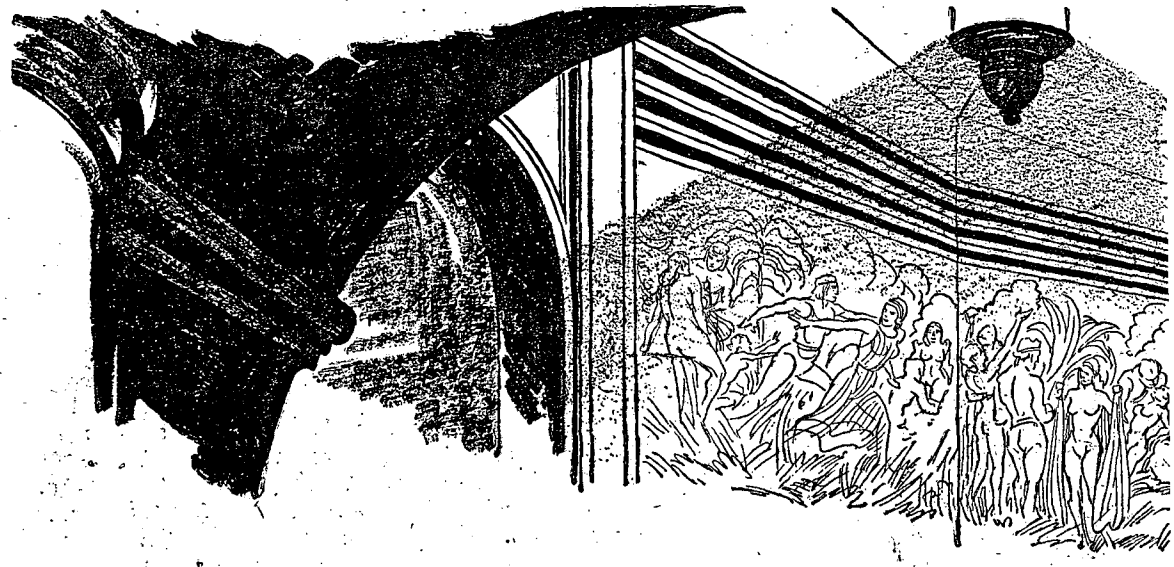

the VIRGIN of ZESH

a novel by L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

"TO BE SURE," said Brian Kirwan the poet, setting his mug with a bang on the table in the Nova Iorque Bar. "We live on fruits and nuts and dance Greek dances in the nude, and as soon as I touch the beach at Zesh I'll be dancing like a young goat in the springtime with the rest of them. No crass commercialism there!"

Herculeu Castanhoso, assistant security-officer of

The lady missionary fled from Earth to escape passion . . . but found out that men are the same everywhere in the universe. . . .

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"The door of the righteous," said the cloaked black figure, "is always open".

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Novorecife, the Terran spaceport on Krishna, thought as he looked at his four table-companions talking a mixture of Brazilo-Portuguese and English, that seldom had he seen a more ill-as-asorted lot, even on a planet notorious for collecting odd tag-ends of humanity.

The stout Kirwan could be amusing enough, but was so unpredictable and so full of self-conceit and self-assertion that nobody could be comfortable around him for long. And the mind reeled at the thought of all that fat capering about some Arcadian lawn with flowers in its hair.

Gottfried Bahr, the psychologist, smiled as he polished his glasses: a tall dark-haired man, rather handsome in a pale, thin gangling way. "But why, my friend? Why not buy an islet off the coast of your native land and perform your dances there? Why come a dozen light-years from Earth?"

Castanhoso unconsciously nodded agreement, but for reasons other than Bahr's. A dignified and conventional little man, he disapproved of eccentric Terran cults that set up shop on Krishna. Such antics, he felt, lowered the human race in the eyes of the touchy and truculent Krishnans and made them harder to deal with.

Kirwan explained: *"Não,* to escape the corrupting influence of decadent human civilization you have to come away from it entirely. Only on a foreign planet will I find spiritual elbow-room to allow the full flowering of my natural genius." He glowered belligerently at Bahr's ironic smile. "Does any man care to make anything of it?"

"Não, senhor," said Bahr. Castanhoso found him the least obnoxious of the lot. If the tall slender German was a man of somewhat arid and pedantic personality, he was at least unlikely to get the Earthmen on Krishna in trouble by some rash antic. It had struck Castanhoso that Bahr looked much more like the conventional idea of a poet than the burly, aggressive Kirwan. Bahr continued:

"Nobody minds if you tie grapes in your hair and dance the kazatska. I was merely wondering if you could enroll Senhorita Merrick in your Rousseilian Society, to solve her problem."

"No thank you," said Althea Merrick. "Even if it weren't against my principles, I'm too skinny to look good without my clothes. Who runs this society, Mr. Kirwan?" Her upper-class New Yorkese made Kirwan's name sound almost like "Cohen."

Castanhoso, whose taste in women ran to the plumply pneumatic type, silently agreed with Athea's main statement. He looked upon Miss Merrick more with pity than with censure. She was not unattractive if one did not mind dark-blonde bean-poles several centimeters taller than oneself. Or rather, she would have been attractive if fixed up properly, instead of garbed in the somber black-and-white uniform of her sect.

Kirwan said: "Felly by the name of Diogo Kuroki, a Japanese-Brazilian."

"You've never been there?" queried Althea.

"No, but I know all about it, and I've written making arrangements. Gottfried's going to Zesh too, so it's together we'll be travelling."

"What does 'Roussellian' mean?"

Kirwan explained: "That's from Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Eighteenth-Century French philosopher who saw through the shams of so-called civilization."

"I remember," said Althea. "The man who wrote about the Noble Savage. But I thought that idea was exploded during the following century when people learned about real savages?"

BAHR spoke up: "It was; the savages turned out to be no nobler than anyone else, and so far from leading free uninhibited lives they were really conventional, habit-ridden people, afraid of anything new or unknown. However, the idea did not stay exploded, be-

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cause all the savages became civilized, so that today there is not one real primitive left on Earth, even in the Matto Grosso of Senhor Herculeu's country. Therefore people forgot what primitives had really been like and revived the myth of utopian barbarism."

"Ah, you don't have to take the primitive part too seriously," said Kirwan, taking a big swig of kvad. "Whether it ever existed or not, the free natural life is still a noble ideal."

Afanasi Gorchakov, the ursine security-officer, and Castanhoso's boss, growled: "Joining this crazy cult might solve the problem of Senhorita Althea, but would not solve mine. How can I persuade her to marry me if she is dancing around this forsaken island?"

Towards Gorchakov, Castanhoso entertained a hatred that made Iago's feeling for Othello seem a passing pique. As a mere customs inspector Gorchakov had been a difficult and moody character, and since his promotion over Castanhoso's head he had become a first-class menace. Castanhoso was also puzzled by the fact that the notoriously lusty Gorchakov should pay court to Althea Merrick, with her prim black uniform dress of a missionary of the Ecumenical Monotheists and her narrow, delicately-featured, fair-skinned face innocent of cosmetics. She was not even really young—witness the little crows' feet around her eyes—but that did not much matter in these days when the longevity-treatment had stretched people's thirties and forties out to more than a century. And unattached Earth-women were so rare on other planets that the men fell over each other in the rush to court them.

But certainly the Senhorita Merrick would always be safe as far as he, Castanhoso, was concerned, even though they were alone on Zesh together for a year. Well, half a year anyway. Or at least a ten-night.

Althea Merrick spoke: "That's kind of you, Senhor Afanasi, but I've already explained why it's impossible—"

Gorchakov interjected: "Is just that you do not know the Russian love!"

"—and neither," continued Althea, with ostentatious lack of interest in Russian love, "can I join Senhor Brian's Roussellians on Zesh. But that still leaves me stranded. Bishop Raman went off on this inspection tour with no word of when he'd be back and without leaving any provision for me."

Castanhoso said: "If you had known the good bishop as we have, Senhorita Althea, you would not be surprised. He is the most disorderly man in the system of Tau Ceti."

"But I still have to eat," said Althea. "Even missionaries do, you know."

Gorchakov said: "You look as if you had not been doing that enough!" He bellowed with laughter and slapped Althea on the back, causing her to spill her glass of water. "Marry me and I

Savage Planet

TAKE a lady missionary with a prim and proper upbringing, stuffed full of notions about saving souls, dump her on a wild and savage planet where the devil takes the hindmost, subject her to every mad indignity which the savage mind can devise and what do you get? A mental case? A martyr? A saint?

Hardly. You won't guess, so string along with de Camp and see what happens to his tough-fibered virgin on the beach of Zesh. You may gasp now and then, but you won't be able to put it down.

—The Editor

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fill you full of borscht; put some weight on you. When I go to bed I like a good *solid* woman—"

Althea raised her voice to cut through this farrago, which gave every promise of becoming embarrassing: "So I thought there might be a schoolteaching job open until the bishop gets back."

Gorchakov took a tremendous gulp of kvad and shook his big broad head. "Nothing like that. I have checked over our civil-service list and there are no openings on the dollar roll, except for one meteorologist and one communications-engineer. You are neither of these, are you?"

"*N-não,* but I'd even take one on the kard roll—"

"The only openings on that are for work with the pick and the shovel. Besides, since you couldn't spend your pay here, you would have to move outside the wall and live in the Hamdá. And considering the class of people who live there, I don't think you would like it."

CASTANHOSO had a pitiful mental picture of Althea's living among the debauchees of the Hamdá by night and bending her spare form over a shovel by day. She would probably try to reform the Hamdá, but that task had already defeated experts.

Kirwan spoke up: "That's the trouble with the damned Earthmen. Too systematic; everything's in accordance with lists and procedures and authorizations. You'd best come to Zesh with me, where there's no crass regulation. Better than staying here to starve, and you so young and all."

"No." She shook her delicately-molded head.

"Well then," Kirwan persisted, "why not ask Dr. Bahr to sign you on as assistant? He'll be going to Zesh the same as me, only for different reasons."

"No grapes in the hair?"

"No indeed. He's got some daft idea of measuring the intelligence of the tailed Krishnans—assuming they've got any."

"Oh, they have," said Bahr. "The question is, have they too much?"

Castanhoso said: "I did not know that one could have too much."

Althea asked: "What is all this business about Zá?"

Bahr explained: "We have been receiving reports of the appearance on Zá of a strain or mutation with a phenomenally high intelligence. And the Advisory Committee on Social Psychology, which is one of the boards of the World Federation, has sent me to look into it."

"That's where our taxes go," said Kirwan, "financing damn-foolish boards and committees. All those tests are fakery and swindling; you can't measure the soul." Ignoring the angry retort that Bahr started to issue, Kirwan turned again to Althea. "But 'twill be worth while if it saves you from poverty and destitution, darling. Just blink those beautiful gray eyes at the silly omadhaun, and he'll hire you to make marks on paper, which is an aisy way to earn a living. How about it, Gottfried?"

Bahr frowned, looking doubtfully at Althea Merrick. "I do not think that she the necessary qualifications has."

Althea Merrick shook her head. "Even if I had, I'm afraid there's too wide a difference between Dr. Bahr's views and mine. Besides, I have to be here when the bishop gets back."

Bahr looked relieved. "You see, my friends? It would not be practical. I am scientist; she is theologist. Besides, this news, if it indeed turns out to be true, is too important to be interpreted by amateurs. It might mean a change in the whole Interplanetary Council policies towards Krishna."

Althea sighed. "Well then. . . ."

Castanhoso, unable longer to stand the sight of femininity in distress, even such unseductive femininity as Althea, burst out: "You need not starve, Senhorita, nor need you try to swing the pick. The *Comandante* has a revolving loan fund for the emergency relief of stranded Terrans—"

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"Who asked you to interfere?" roared Gorchakov. At the bellow the whole bar fell silent. "Keep your ugly little face out of this!"

Castanhoso, stung to defiance, snapped back: "I merely tell her what she could have found out by asking in the proper quarters. I have a right—"

"You have what rights I say! I, Afanasi Vasilyitch Gorchakov!" The security-officer turned his small porcine eyes on Althea Merrick. "Don't let him lead you astray, Senhorita. Is true the *Comandante* has this fund, but he is Boris Glumelin, a very good friend of mine. He would follow my recommendation—"

"Hey!" said Brian Kirwan. "So it's forcing your loathsome attentions on the lady by dirty politics you are?"

"I am boss here," rumbled Gorchakov. "You shut up, see?" He glared from man to man.

Bahr, the scientist, shifted his eyes and pulled nervously at his lower lip. Castanhoso, his moment of heroism past, also remained silent. But Kirwan shouted:

"Be damned to you! Any time I let a crass bureaucrat tell me to shut up—"

Kirwan and Gorchakov both rose like a pair of broaching whales. As he got to his feet, the security-officer picked up an empty kvad-mug.

"Please!" exclaimed Althea Merrick, starting to rise between the two furious males, extending her hands palms out in the peacemaker's classical gesture. "I wouldn't have—"

There was a general scraping of chair-legs. Gorchakov swung back his right arm to throw the mug at Kirwan, who leaned over the table and shot out a fist in a long straight left for Gorchakov's face.

But whether unsteady from drink or simply incompetent in fisticuffs, Kirwan did not hit Gorchakov. At that moment Althea Merrick thrust her head into the line of his punch, which connected with a meaty sound just below her left ear.

The girl was hurled to the floor. At the same instant there sounded the crash of the earthenware mug, thrown by Gorchakov, as it shattered on Kirwan's head. Kirwan staggered back, clutching his head.

Gorchakov seized the edge of the table and overturned it with a crash of drinking-vessels. Then he smashed the poet back against the wall with a one-two punch, followed by a kick in the paunch that curled Kirwan into a huddled and half-conscious mass.

Castanhoso, who had watched this train of events with open mouth, started around the fallen table to succor Miss Merrick.

"Get away!" screamed Gorchakov, stepping between his assistant and the girl. "Get out, all of you! Everyone but Yü!" Yü was the bartender.

Though Gorchakov was not wearing a gun, the others in the Nova Iorque all shuffled out, glowering and muttering but not openly rebelling.

"Take this along!" Gorchakov commanded, indicating Kirwan, "before I kill the dog!"

He then turned to Althea Merrick and tenderly lifted her into a chair. "My poor little *byednyashka!* Yü, a bottle of kvad!"

As he staggered out of the Nova Iorque with one of Kirwan's hairy arms about his neck, Castanhoso glanced back into the empty bar. His boss was pouring kvad into the reviving Althea—despite the fact that, as she had explained earlier, she had not touched a drop since embarking upon a missionary career.

The results, however deplorable, should be interesting. . . .

II

ALTHEA MERRICK opened her eyes slowly because of the ache in her head. Then she started violently as she took in the fact that she was in a strange room. She blinked as the light sent sharp pains shooting through her skull, in which somebody seemed to have installed a large, heavy and badly-bal-

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anced piece of machinery, now running at full speed.

She was sitting in an arm-chair of Terran pattern, in a nondescript bed-sitting room furnished comfortably but without visible evidence of taste. There was a folding bed, unfolded; a bureau with an atomic alarm-clock . . and bending over her an enormous man with a broad snub-nosed face under thick black hair.

Afanasi Gorchakov was holding one of her hands in one of his, stroking it with the other hand, and muttering in a strongly consonantal language which Althea took to be his native Russian. The effect was that of a Kodiak bear making up to a gazelle.

"Ah, you have come to!" shouted Gorchakov. "Is good!"

Althea shook her head to clear it; then regretted doing so because the machine in her skull came loose and slid back and forth, banging against the walls of its container. She said:

"Where's this? Am I in your rooms?"

"Naturally, my little Althea." (He pronounced it "Alsea.")

"But how—how did I get here?"

"You don't remember?"

Althea blinked. "Not a thing after you and Mr. Kirwan started fighting." She felt the side of her neck where Kirwan's punch had landed. "Ow! Somebody hit me!"

"Was that swine Kirwan. I should have killed him when I had the chance. Anyway I brought you to with a drink of kvad—"

Althea's mission conscience sprang to life. "But you shouldn't have! I'm not supposed—"

"Forget that silly mission business now. You got a little—how shall I say? —happy on the kvad, so we got married—"

"What?"

"Of course. Don't you even remember that? You said you always wanted a big man like me, full of strong Russian love, so I got the register out of the safe and signed us up. Then you moved out—I mean passed out—again."

Swept by panic, Althea jumped to her feet. Gorchakov's statements seemed to her mere gibberings; she could not conceivably imagine herself as leading the loathsome brute on. "Oh my God! Let me out of here quickly!"

"What is? Where you think you're going?"

"I don't know—but let me go!' Althea tried to twist her arm out of Gorchakov's grasp, but the giant only clamped down tighter.

"It that any way to treat your new husband?" he cried plaintively. "I love you! *Ya vas lyu blyu!* Calm yourself down and let me show you the Russian love!" The Kodiak bear seemed unable to understand why the antelope misconstrued his growls.

Gorchakov extended his other arm to pull Althea to him. With a scream of terror Althea lashed out with her free fist and caught Gorchakov's looming face on its button nose. An inhibited girl who had led a sheltered life, and never much attracted by sex even in her pre-mission days, Althea was now beside herself with panic and horror.

"Akh!" shouted Gorchakov and retaliated with a slap that threw her back into the chair. Purple-faced he stormed down at her:

"So, that's how you treat your husband, eh? Well, I show you I'm no spineless American to let my women walk on me! I, Afanasi Gorchakov, could have any woman in Novorecife, but when I actual marry you, you don't appreciate honor! You don't want Russian love, so you get a taste of Russian hate!"

Gorchakov hauled Althea to her feet and towed her over to the bureau. With his free hand he rummaged through the disorderly drawers until he came upon a whip, which he tossed on to the bed.

"Now, little one," he continued, "you learn how to be right kind of wife."

HE FUMBLED one-handed with the buttons and ties that held Althea's black mission dress together. Then,

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"We live on fruits and nuts and dance Greek dances—"

growing impatient, he slipped his thick fingers inside the prim collar and with a terrific yank and a ripping of cloth pulled the garment loose. Althea's undergarments followed, rip, rip, rip, until she stood in her shoes: a contingency for which her missionary training had not prepared her. She struggled and screamed, but no help came.

By this time so much terror had been inflicted upon Althea Merrick that nothing seemed to matter. One part of her mind stood aside and objectively wondered whether Gorchakov was going to beat her to death. The most probable outcome seemed to be that he would merely beat her half to death and then give her a good raping—or what would be a good raping if he were not her husband. (Her father had been a lawyer.) What life would be like thereafter she did not, in her present confusion and terror, even try to think.

All this time the iron grip upon her wrist had never relaxed. Though no weakling, Althea thought that Gorchakov could easily break her arm by a simple twist.

Gorchakov picked up the whip. The detached part of Althea's mind registered a shade of surprise, perhaps not unmixed with pique, that the sight of

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her in her present condition had not deflected his intentions from their present sadistic direction into a more normally erotic channel. But then, this sub-personality told itself, no doubt he was used to the sight of naked women. Or perhaps Althea's greyhound figure lacked normal feminine allure. (Althea was really better endowed in this respect than she, in her over-modest way, gave herself credit for. Her bumps, if not large, were well and neatly formed.)

The whip whistled and a streak of fire ran down Althea's back. Simultaneously with the crack of the whip came Gorchakov's deep "Ha!" and Althea's scream of pain. The girl leaped convulsively like a stabbed wild thing—and wrenched her arm loose.

Whether Gorchakov had slackened his grip or whether the pain had lent Althea extra strength she did not now stop to ponder. Her long legs carried her in a leap across the room before Gorchakov could again raise the whip.

Althea fetched up against the bureau from which Gorchakov had taken the whip, its top drawer still open to reveal a chaos of personal effects. Althea looked frantically for a weapon or missile. The likeliest object was the atomic-powered clock on the dresser. Such clocks were quite heavy because of the lead shielding around their works.

And in the course of an outdoorsy and tomboyish girlhood, Althea had at one time been noted among her age-peers as a pretty good girl softball pitcher.

THUS as Gorchakov lumbered across the room, whip raised and clutching hand outstretched, his own alarm-clock whizzed through the air and struck his cranium with a short sharp thud. Gorchakov stumbled and fell forward, the whip dropping from his hand as he sprawled at Althea's feet. His arms and legs moved slightly in a feeble and uncoördinated fashion, like those of a beheaded reptile. The clock lay near his head, its second-hand serenely revolving at its unvarying rate.

Althea turned to the nearest of the room's two windows, the one beside the bureau. She wrenched it open, unlatched and opened the screen, and looked out.

She was staring down from the second story into the courtyard of one of Novorecife's several compounds or interior-court buildings, sturdy graceless structures designed to repel assault rather than to beguile by beauty. They were all of hollow rectangular form with outside windows small and high up, more like loopholes than windows—as their designer intended.

The court was lit by one of Krishna's three moons, but as this was big Karrim, the illumination was several times that shed by Earth's Luna at full. Nobody moved in the court. The entrance from the outside into the court lay bare and unguarded, for the *Viagens* was at peace with the world of Krishna.

Althea glanced back at Gorchakov, wondering whether he was dead, dying or merely stunned. His lungs were expanding and contracting regularly, and slight snoring sounds came from his throat. Althea concluded that he was merely stunned and, more ominously, might awaken at any moment. The thought filled her again with panic.

Though normally a modest girl who had never patronized the nuderies found at most Terran beach-resorts, Althea in her terror did not now stop even to snatch a garment from Gorchakov's supply. Instead, she slipped over the sill, lowered herself until she hung by her hands, and dropped.

GORCHAKOV'S suite was in Compound 12, along with those of most of the other *fiscais* of the *Viagens Interplanetarias*. Bahr and Kirwan, Althea knew, shared a room in the transient quarters in Compound 11. Like an ivory streak in the moonlight, Althea raced out of Compound 12, across the street, and into Compound 11.

The only persons who saw her during

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her flight were Oswaldo Guerra, a clerk in the Terran Embassy, and Kristina Brunius, a stenographer-typist in the *Viagens* offices. Senhor Guerra was kissing Jungfru Brunius good-night in the doorway that let into the section of the quadrangle tenanted by Bahr and Kirwan when Althea Merrick, coming up at a run, said: "Excuse me please!" and squeezed past the loving couple. She paused in the vestibule to scan the name-plates beside the call-buttons and disappeared into the building. Oswaldo Guerra, in the Brazilo-Portuguêse of the spaceways, said:

"Did you see what I saw?"

"I must have," replied Kristina Brunius. "I could almost swear it was that American girl missionary, that Senhorita Merrick."

"But that is, of course, impossible," said Guerra. "Try to imagine that prim Miss Merrick. . . ."

"You're so right, Oswaldo. It is, of course, impossible. Where were we?"

They melted into each other's arms again and took up where they had left off, Guerra rising on tiptoe to reach his stalwart Swedish sweetheart. Meanwhile Althea Merrick bounded up the stairs to the second floor, found Bahr's and Kirwan's room, and burst in.

The light was still on. The room contained two beds. In one of these Gottfried Bahr, clad in pajamas decorated with dragons, roses and sunbursts, lay with his hands behind his head, which was propped up both on his own pillow and Kirwan's. There was a half-empty glass on the small night-table between the two beds. The other bed was empty. Brian Kirwan sat in his underwear in one of the room's two chairs before the little desk, writing in long-hand. A couple of pieces of adhesive-tape marked the places where Gorchakov's fists had found his face. A half-empty glass stood on the desk beside his writing-paper.

Althea closed the door behind her and stood with her back to it, panting. Both men stared at her in stupefaction.

"I—" began Althea, but had to halt for lack of breath.

Kirwan at last transferred his fascinated gaze from Althea to Bahr, saying: "D'you suppose it's a man she'll be wanting? Whatever it is, she seems in a devil of a hurry for it."

"I—" began Althea again, then broke off to pant some more.

Bahr said: "One cannot tell. When these inhibited types finally burst loose. . . ."

Althea, still unable to speak, walked over to the empty bed and slid her long form in under the top sheet. Thus was convention to a very minor degree restored. Bahr said:

"She chooses you, my friend. It must be the ubiquitous charm of the Irish."

"Well," said Kirwan, "she'll have to wait until I finish this."

"I—" said Althea.

"What is that?" asked Bahr. "A poem?"

"No, a letter to my grandmother in Dublin. Have to keep on the good side of the old hag, so when she finally kicks off she'll leave me enough so I can live like a gentleman." Kirwan looked back again at Althea, whose fists were clenched and whose eyes were filled with tears of rage and frustration. "All right now, Althea darling, pull yourself together and tell us what it's all about, now."

"If you—if you two—if you two *theophobes* will stop insulting me for a minute. . . ."

Althea burst into tears. Kirwan got up, picked a handkerchief off a pile of his personalia on the bureau, and offered it to Althea, who wiped her eyes and blew her nose.

"You might have given her a clean one," said Bahr.

"I don't believe in germs," said Kirwan. "Go on, Althea."

ALTHEA pulled herself together. These two might be even less trustworthy than most men (Althea having a somewhat dour and suspicious view of the sex as a whole) but right now

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they were the nearest thing to friends that she had. She told the story of her alleged marriage to Afanasi Gorchakov, concluding: ". . . so, since you're leaving tomorrow, I thought maybe—perhaps you could arrange to get me away from Novorecife."

"You mean you want to dance on the beaches with grapes in your hair after all?" said Kirwan. "I see. You're getting in a bit of early practice."

Althea shot a look of scorn at the fleshly poet. "Not exactly—but I don't dare stay around here until Bishop Raman gets back, since Gorchakov's so powerful. . . ."

"What she means, my friend," said Bahr, "is that she wishes with us to go; and when she gets to Zesh she will decide between your cult and my science. Is that it, Althea?"

Althea gave Bahr a grateful look. At least he could talk sense. "Well—I have to live, and I can't live here. If you could give me some work. . . ."

Bahr pulled his lip. "Mmm. That is not easy. I am not authorized to pay a full-time assistant in World-Federation dollars."

Kirwan said: "Oh, hell, man, you could pay her expenses and swindle the cost out of your expense account."

"Ye-es; but I am not sure that she is qualified a real assistant to be. Besides, it would cause trouble for me here if it were found out that I had Gorchakov's bride abducted."

"Where's your gallantry, you damned poltroon?" shouted Kirwan. "Are you a man or a microscope on two legs?"

"Oh, I will do it, I'll do it," said Bahr in the unhappy voice of one who is having heroism thrust unwanted upon him. "But how are we to get her out of Novorecife?" The scientist turned to Althea. "Are your papers signed for exit?"

"No. I didn't intend to leave until I'd received my assignment."

"That complicates matters," said Bahr with hope in his voice, "as you cannot get out unless your exit permit is signed by the security-officer."

"I know!" said Kirwan. "We'll call up that little twerp Castanhoso—"

He reached for the telephone, but Bahr gave a squeak of alarm. "*Auf!* Wait a minute, my friend; what are you doing? He is assistant to Gorchakov—"

"I know, I know, but he hates the big Russky's guts."

"Why?" said Bahr.

Kirwan explained: "Castanhoso was assistant security-officer under Gorchakov's predecessor, Cristôvão Abreu, when Gorchakov—may the teeth rot in the head of him—was head customs inspector. When Kennedy and Abreu retired as *Comandante* and security-officer respectively, Castanhoso expected to step into Abreu's shoes. But Boris Glumelin arrived here as *Comandante* and, being full of crass nationalistic bias, jumped Gorchakov over Castanhoso's head. Ever since, Castanhoso's been grinding his teeth behind Gorchakov's back and looking for a chance to do the other in," said Kirwan with a sneer.

"I think Herculeu Castanhoso's a nice fellow," said Althea.

"Nice fellow or not, he's the lad who can get you out of this trap." Kirwan dialled and spoke. "Senhor Herculeu? This is Brian Kirwan, the Irish Homer. It's sorry I am to drag you from bed at such an hour, but it's a matter of life and death. Can you stagger over to this little crack in the wall you call a transient room? . . . yes, 2-F, Compound Eleven . . . yes, you're damned right it's important . . . oh, wait a minute. Althea, have you got your key with you? Foolish question. Herculeu, bring a pass-key that'll open Miss Merrick's room. Which is that, Althea? One-Q? Sure, sure . . . and none of your Brazilian procrastination, my lad. Fire all jets."

KIRWAN hung up and turned back to the other two. "Well, comrades, the evening's turning out a bit different from what I had in mind when the lassie burst in here like Deirdre running away from Conchobar. Though I can't say—I'm sorry, for I'm thinking the man who

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breaks this filly in has got his work cut out for him."

"Don't you think of anything but sex?" said Althea vehemently, uncertain whether to be angry at the man's constant insolence or amused by his fantastic way of speaking.

"Sometimes I think of whiskey," said Kirwan. "If you'd like a drop, now . . . ."

Bahr, with a worried frown, said: "What do you plan to do, Brian?"

"With the key we'll get Althea's papers and necessaries from her room. We'll get this pocket Hercules to forge Gorchakov's signature on the exit permit—"

"*Hei!* How do you know he will?"

"I don't, but I can only find out by asking. And if worst comes to worst we should be able to raise a small bribe between us. Then we'll shake that coachman of ours out of bed, make him hitch up his ayas, and be off down the river road before Roqir shows its ugly nose over the horizon."

"A fine plan," said Bahr, "if you can execute it."

"What, the great Brian Kirwan not able to carry out a plan? What nonsense you're talking. Althea, do you have any rough travelling-clothes—none of these sad black nunnery-novice things your heretical so-called church makes you wear, but plain shirt and trousers?"

"No; I was told to bring only my uniforms from Earth, and to buy whatever else I needed at Novorecife."

Kirwan glanced at himself and at Bahr. "Gottfried, everything of yours'll be too long and everything of mine'll be too big around. But with yours she has only to roll up the legs and sleeves."

He untied the barracks-bag containing Bahr's gear, dumped the contents out on the floor, and picked a khaki shirt and a pair of slacks out of the mess and tossed them to Althea.

"Now," he said, "leap out of that bed and put these on; no nonsense. You too, Gottfried." And Kirwan began pulling on his own outer clothing. Bahr, wearing a martyred expression, got out of his bed and began repacking his bag.

"Turn your backs," said Althea. "I won't get out of bed until you do."

When Castanhoso knocked on the door a few minutes later, the augmented expedition to Zesh was combing its collective hair and stacking its luggage preparatory to departure.

III

THE barouche trotted through the Hamdá east of Novorecife, a little settlement where beings from a dozen planets lived in a state of picturesque disorder as noteworthy in its way as the prim efficiency of Novorecife. The driver swerved to avoid a trio of drunks—an Earthman, Krishnan and a reptile-man from Osiris—swinging down the street and arms around each other's necks, singing a song about an English king who lived long years ago, and who ruled his land with an iron hand though his mind was weak and low.

Then the carriage reached open country and the driver whipped his team to a gallop. The barouche raced along the river road, its wheels rattling and the twelve hooves of its two ayas drumming. Overhead Karrim, looking twice as big and four times as bright as the earthly moon, lit up the flat Krishnan landscape, while smaller Golnaz, half full, had just risen and little Sheb lay below the horizon.

The driver, a gnarled and taciturn Gozashtandu, human-looking but for his green hair, large pointed ears, and feathery antennae sprouting from between his brows, gripped his reins tautly, leaning to right and left as the road followed the bends of the Pichidé River winding its way over the Gozashtando plain towards the Sadabao Sea. In the body of the vehicle sat Althea Merrick, Gottfried Bahr, and Brian Kirwan. Now and then one or another looked out and back along the road as if fearful that something followed.

Kirwan spoke above the noise: "I told you it would be easy. When the great

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Brian Kirwan turns on the blarney, neither man nor woman can resist him. Damned if I don't make a poem about this rescue; something in heroic heptameters."

Althea Merrick said: "I used to consider myself well read, Mr. Kirwan, but I don't remember coming across any of your poems. What have you had published?"

"No crass best-sellers, if that's what you'll be thinking of," said Kirwan. "My poems are published in five small volumes of limited editions. The first volume was put out in 2119 under the title of 'The Seven Square Serpents', bound in limp lavender leather and limited to ninety-nine copies. That, my girl, is art—none of your swinish Boeotian commercialism."

"Then how do you live?" asked Althea.

"Oh, various worthless ancestors of mine have conveniently crossed the Stygian ferry, and Ireland's the one country left where a man can get a bit of a legacy without its all being taken away by taxes."

Gottfried Bahr spoke up: "Very interesting, but we had better give thought to Miss Merrick's future. Do you wish all the way to Zesh to go?"

"What else can I do?" she said. "I don't know how I could make my living in Majbur."

"That she could not," said Kirwan, "now that we're all given this damned Saint-Rémy treatment that ties our tongues in knots when we try to impart useful information to the Krishnans."

A deep groan rolled across the plain. The ayas twitched their ears in alarm and increased their speed.

"What's that?" said Althea, shivering.

"That would be a hunting yeki," said Kirwan. "You know, one of those big brown things like a lion and a bear and an otter rolled into one, with six legs."

"Let us hope it does not hunt us," said Bahr in a strained voice.

"Ah, we wouldn't let this Krishnan pussy-cat hurt the darling girl, now would we?" said Kirwan. "Anyway, she can pray to her E.-M. God."

"It is all very well to joke." Bahr plucked the driver's sleeve. "Can you not go faster?" he said in Gōzashtandou.

"Any faster would overset us on these turns, my lord," said the driver, leaning as they rounded a bend on two wheels.

ALTHEA asked, "Dr. Bahr, what's your program? You said something about testing a strain of genius that has appeared on Zá. Is that near Zesh?"

Bahr replied, "The *Krishnanthropi kolofti* live on Zá, between Jerud and Ulvanagh. Zesh is a much smaller island southwest of Zá."

"But all the other islands are inhabited by the tailless Krishnans, aren't they?"

"Yes, until one gets down south to Fossanderan."

"And what's on Zesh? Do Mr. Kirwan's Roussellians live with the tailed Krishnans?"

"Not likely!" said Kirwan. "We've got an agreement with the king of the monkeys to leave us alone. The other monkeys all live on Zá, except one female they call the Virgin of Zesh—at least that's what they *call* her—and come over only for ceremonies."

"Who's this Virgin?" asked Althea.

"Oh, some kind of heathen priestess or oracle. When you get there there'll be two virgins, I suppose, unless you lose your status on the way and a good thing too."

Althea pressed her lips together with annoyance, but ignored the gibe. She asked Bahr, "Then why are you going to Zesh instead of to Zá?"

"Because if one lands uninvited on Zá, the tailed ones knock one's brains out."

"Hospitable fellows," said Kirwan.

"It is not surprising," said Bahr. "The tailless Krishnans have been attacked so often by slavers that they are very, very touchy. So I propose to land first

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on Zesh and get in touch with this Virgin, and try through her to persuade the other Záva to be tested."

"And if that isn't a silly thing for a grown man to do," said Kirwan, "to spend your days asking a lot of monkeys which box you've hidden the apple under."

Bahr said with strained politeness: "My dear Brian, I assure you that the mental level I anticipate to have to test is much higher than you are implying. It's more likely I shall have to ask them problems in the calculus to solve."

"I thought," said Althea, "the scientists agreed all races were equally intelligent."

Bahr smiled tolerantly. "That is an example of the lag between discovery and public understanding. Two centuries ago the opinion was, not that all races were exactly equal, but that there was no scientific reason to believe them unequal. Now that the tests have been further refined we do know of some small differences."

"What differences?" asked Althea.

"Well, you know it is very difficult to give tests that will cancel out the effects of environment and upbringing, because so much of the adult's abilities depend on them. Then when you've done that, you still have the wide variation of individuals within one race, which masks any slight average difference. And then you have the sex-difference, which is real though small. And finally when you eliminate all those variants, you find that there is no such thing as general intelligence, but only a lot of different mental abilities. Thus the white race seems to be slightly ahead of the others in mathematical apperception, the black in artistic talent, and the yellow in manual dexterity. And so on with the other individual aptitudes: clerical, structural, and so forth. But the average differences between one race and another are so microscopic compared to the differences within each group, that one can nothing tell about—"

Kirwan yawned. "Gottfried, you're a nice lad in some ways, but a fearful bore at times. The Devil fly away with your aptitudes and statistics!"

"Assuming there is a Devil, which is not scientific," said Bahr, "what is your objection?"

"Sure, every intelligent man knows there's just one superior race, and that's the great and glorious Keltic Race."

"Which is not a race but a language-group," interjected Bahr, but Kirwan continued:

"All the rest of humanity is nothing but apes with the hair shaved off, the lot of 'em. Wherever you find signs of genius, whether it's the pyramids of Egypt, the Roman legal codes, or the American skyscrapers, you can be sure there's a touch of the true Keltic blood involved."

Bahr sighed. "It is hard to argue scientific matters with an Irishman, harder yet with a poet, and impossible with an Irish poet. Anyway, on Krishna we deal with separate species, not mere racial variants of one species as on Earth. So any presuppositions are unscientific."

AT THE mouth of the Pichidé River, on the south bank of the estuary, lies the Free City of Majbur, a seething commercial metropolis noted for the height of its buildings, the acumen of its merchants, and the impenetrability of its traffic-jams.

Following the river road downstream from Novorecife, the barouche bearing Althea Merrick, Brian Kirwan and Gottfried Bahr rattled into the fishing village of Qadr, across the river from Majbur. It was the fifth day after leaving the *Viagens* outpost.

As they neared the village, the road converged with the rail-line from Hershid, the capital of Gozashtand. Now the carriage rolled past the terminal, where a mahout astride the neck of a bishtar—a creature something like an elephant with too many of everything—was making up a train. The bishtar trundled the little four-wheeled cars up one spur and down another, pulling

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them with its trunks or pushing with its forehead, according to the commands which its rider gave by blowing a shrill little trumpet.

Beyond the railroad terminal a fishy smell overhung the sad rows of sagging shacks that lined the highway. Small tame eshuna ran out to howl at the carriage. Krishnan working women sat in doorways, some with glass-topped incubators containing their unhatched eggs beside them, while swarms of Krishnan children, naked but for a substantial coating of dirt, chased hither and yon screaming at each other.

The fishy smell increased as the vehicle coasted with squealing brakes down the slope to the shore, where Krishnan men mended nets, smoked cheap cigars, and yarned while eshuna dug in piles of marine offal and fought each other over the head of some egregious denizen of the Krishnan deeps. The driver drew up at the empty ferry-slip, set his brake, drew from his wallet a saláf-root, bit off a piece, and sat there silently chewing, his jaw moving with metronomic monotony.

Althea and her companions got out of the carriage, which creaked on its suspension-straps as they left it. In five days of fast riding over Krishnan roads Althea had learned to stretch her cramped limbs at every chance. She and her companions strolled out to the end of the pier, where several Krishnans stood or sat on the tops of the piles. These stared briefly at the Terrans, then returned to their absorption in their own concerns.

Althea looked out over the broad estuary towards Majbur, whose five and six-story buildings rose in a crowded mass against the the flat skyline. To the right the placid Pichidé sparkled in the late-afternoon light of Roqir, while to the left the estuary merged with the emerald-green waters of the Sadabáo Sea.

Here and there a sail, bright in the sunlight, broke the horizon.

"There's the ferry," said Kirwan.

UNDER the impulse of a pair of yellow triangular sails and a set of sweeps a big rectangular double-ended barge moved sluggishly on the estuary. Little by little it grew until Althea could see the passengers clustering it: gentlefolk in satiny stuffs, with swords at their sides; laborers in breechclouts; seafarers in sashes, with stocking-caps wound turbanwise around their heads; even a Terran tourist in a rumpled white suit with a camera-case dangling around his neck.

Althea watched the approach of the barge silently. During the past five days the men had made it plain that they did not wish to be proselyted, and Althea was not aggressive enough to thrust upon them uninvited a doctrine about which she herself entertained secret qualms. Bahr could talk about his specialty, but on such a technical level that he soon left the other two floundering. And Kirwan, the most garrulous of the three, had soon wearied his companions by his eternal boasting and self-assertion, and by his habit of bursting into a tirade of insults whenever crossed.

The ferry nosed into its slip. Its passengers streamed ashore, and those waiting on the pier in their turn boarded the craft, paying their fares to a piratical-looking captain on the companionway. When the carriage started to move aboard, with members of the crew grasping the wheel-hubs to help it over the bumps, a furious argument broke out between the driver and the ferry-skipper.

"What's this?" said Kirwan in Brazilo-Portuguese.

The driver said, "This rascal try to collect twice regular tariff for carriages. He think rich Earthmen can afford extra charge."

"The black-hearted spalpeen!" roared Kirwan. "Let me at him!" And the poet began to yell at the captain in a weird pidgin-mixture of English, Portuguese and Gozashtandou that he apparently made up as he went along: *"Tamates, hishkako baghan,* d'ye think I *tozoros*

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voce swindle me. . . ."

The captain looked puzzled and spoke to the driver, who translated, "He no understand."

"Hell, don't he understand his own language, and me so fluent and all?" said Kirwan. "The man must be half-witted."

Bahr addressed the captain in careful Gozashtandou: "Good my sir, pray take not advantage of our plight. For we're no visitors rich to be bilked, but harried fugitives from our own kind's vengeance and as such have a claim upon your mercy."

"What are you fugitives from?" asked the captain.

"See you this wench? Her cruel mate swore to slay her because he'd learned of her love for us, so we snatched her from him. But he follows hard upon our track with—"

"Mean you you're *both* her lovers?" cried the captain. "Me-thought you Terrans were monogamists."

"Ah, but such is our love for her that she couldn't spurn either lest the one rejected perish of a broken liver. So you'll not—"

Althea started as the purport of this speech reached her consciousness.

"Nay, nay, get aboard," said the captain. "I'll pay your fee from my own pocket, so poignantly has your tale plucked at the strings of my affections. Yarely, now!"

"Good heavens!" said Althea. "Dr. Bahr, you've made me out not only an adulteress, but a polyandrous one as well! If that ever gets around in mission circles—"

"Your missionary career will be mud," said Kirwan, "and a good thing too, I'm thinking."

ALTHEA sighed. Life on Earth might have had its shortcomings, but it was simple compared with the bizarre misadventures that she had undergone on Krishna, where each step seemed to plunge her further into the quicksand of a more involved predicament. Kirwan continued:

"At any rate our professor got us a free ride. How'd you work it, Gottfried?"

"I know the psychology of these people. Although even more cruel and belligerent than Terrans, they are also very romantic and sentimental in outlook. The captain could not resist an appeal to his sympathy for runaway lovers."

Althea said: "I'm sorry you couldn't have done something like that to Gorchakov."

"A different type," said Bahr. "A somatonic dynamophile, slightly schizoid with a paranoid tendency, in addition to his sadism. Very, very hard to influence."

Althea stood on the edge of the deck, holding a mast-stay to steady herself as the ferry cast off. The crew swarmed about the rigging and reversed the set of the two yellow sails with much pother and shouting. One of these crewmen, Althea noticed, was a tailed Krishnan in a dirty loin-cloth, covered with dark olive-brown hair not quite thick enough to merit the term "pelt." He was shorter and broader than his tailless fellows, bearing a relationship to them that paralleled that of such prehistoric races as the Neanderthal to Terran man. The tailed one's face reminded Athea, in a subhuman way, of that of a football player from Yale with whom she had thought herself in love before her brothers had broken up the romance. It also seemed that the tailed one was something less than a perfect ferry-hand, for the skipper shouted and swore at him more than at all the others put together:

"Come down, Jinych! Pay out the luff brace, haul it not in! Nay, not that rope; that one! Beware; you'll catch your tail in the block! Oh, gods, that I should be afflicted with such a clodpate!" Then a moment later: "Jinych, what in the name of Dashmok are you doing now? Whatever it is, cease forthwith!"

The ferry got under way with the

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hapless Jinych working an oar, one task that seemed within his capacity. Althea found it hard to imagine a being of this type developing an intellect of Newtonian power. Her brothers, she remembered, had likewise deemed the football player subhuman, and then he had become president of Amalgamated Lobbyists and richer than all the Merricks put together.

IV

MAJBUR rose behind a kind of fence, which resolved itself into the masts and spars of the ships along the waterfront: war-galleys with gilded figureheads; high-sided square-riggers from the stormy Va'andao Sea; lateen-rigged merchantmen from the Sadabao and Banjao ports, with yards slanting up at all angles; and a miscellany of local craft: fishermen, river-barges, timber-rafts, pleasure-yachts, and so on.

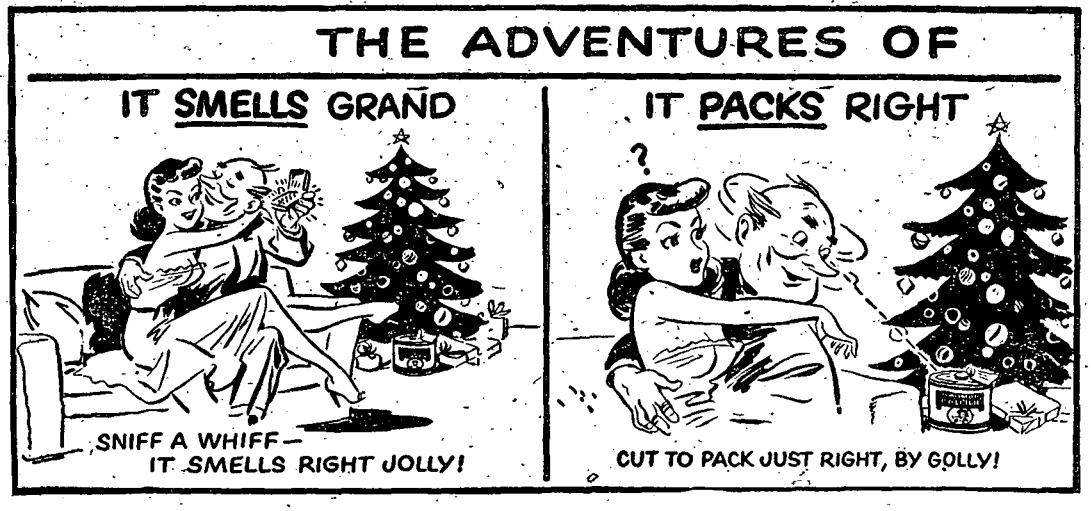
The ferry crew grunted at their sweeps as the craft crept into its dock, its yellow sails banging and flapping in th uncertain breeze, then subsiding as crewmen shinnied up the slanting yards to furl them. The passengers streamed ashore. Crewmen heaved the carriage off the ship. Althea and the two Earthmen got back in, and they rolled into Majbur Town.

The carriage picked its way through the traffic that choked the narrow streets. The second and higher floors of the lofty buildings were built out over the sidewalks, upheld by long rows of arches of intricately-carved stonework.

"Damn!" said Kirwan, quick to complain over the least delay or inconvenience. "If I knew where this beggar Gorbovast was I'd walk."

When the carriage-driver dropped them at Gorbovast's office and had been paid off, the Earthmen had another half-hour's wait before being ushered in.

Gorbovast bad-Sár was an elderly Gozashtandu, his visage covered with tiny wrinkles and hair faded to the color of pale jade. (Krishnans did not get bald.) For decades he had sat behind this desk, serving as resident commissioner in Majbur, first to King Eqrar of Gozashtand and now to his successor King Kudair. In addition he fulfilled a number of other functions, some known to his imperial master and some not: dabbling in the many business enterprises of Majbur, helping out non-Krishnans who got into trouble, and furnishing the *Viagens* security-force with information. Lately there had been talk of establishing a regular Terran consulate in Majbur, as there were in Hershid, Mishé, and Zanid, but nothing had been done on the ground that "Gorbovast can fix anything."



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Now Gorbovast looked up from his mare's nest of papers and said in accented but adequate English: "Good day, Madame Gorchakova. Good day, Dr. Bahr and Mr. Kirwan. I hope you are in good healt'?"

Althea gasped and Bahr said: "Excuse me, my friend, but how did you know this lady?"

Gorbovast smiled. "It is my business to know sings, sir. You arrived more soon zan I expected. I suppose you still weesh to sail on ze *Ta'zu* day after tomorrow?"

Kirwan said: "If you know so much, my man, perhaps you can tell if anybody's following us?"

Gorbovast made the negative gesture. "Alas, Mr. Kirwan! My information does not yet cover zat point; I do not know if Mr. Gorchakov is on ze trail of his runoff bride."

Althea shuddered, fearing Gorchakov much more than the tailed skull-knockers of Zá.

"Then," said Kirwan, "we'd better get off an earlier boat, d'ye get me?"

Gorbovast looked dubious, but pawed through his papers until he found one that he studied.

"Hm," he said. "Captain Memzadá sails wit' his *Labághti* tonight for Darya via Reshr, Jerud and Ulvanagh, wit' a cargo of—mmm—never mind ze cargo. He could stop at Zesh. But he will leave wizzin ze hour, to take advantage of ze tide and ze offshore wind. Small ship, not so comfortable as ze *Ta'zu*—but if we hurry we could make arrangements."

The three Terrans exchanged glances. Althea said: "I don't like to trouble you boys when you've done so much for me, but if that horrible man. . . ."

"We'll go tonight," said Kirwan. "Right, Gottfried my boy?"

"Well—ah—all right."

"I will accompany you to ze ship," said Gorbovast.

THE harbor of Reshr, the first stop of the *Labághti* after leaving Majbur, sank below the horizon. Althea Merrick sat on the deck at the bow with her long legs curled under her and her back against the rail. Ahead, the emerald Sadabao Sea lay dark against the darkening evening sky. Aft, the huge lateen mainsail, striped with scarlet and gold, shut off most of the feverishly colored sunset, the forward-raking mast rising almost over Althea's head.

Below the lower edge of the bellying sail Althea could see the after part of the ship with its smaller mizzenmast and sail, and Captain Memzadá, gloomily silent as ever, gripping his tiller on the little poop-deck. The captain and the crew were all Daryava, speaking a

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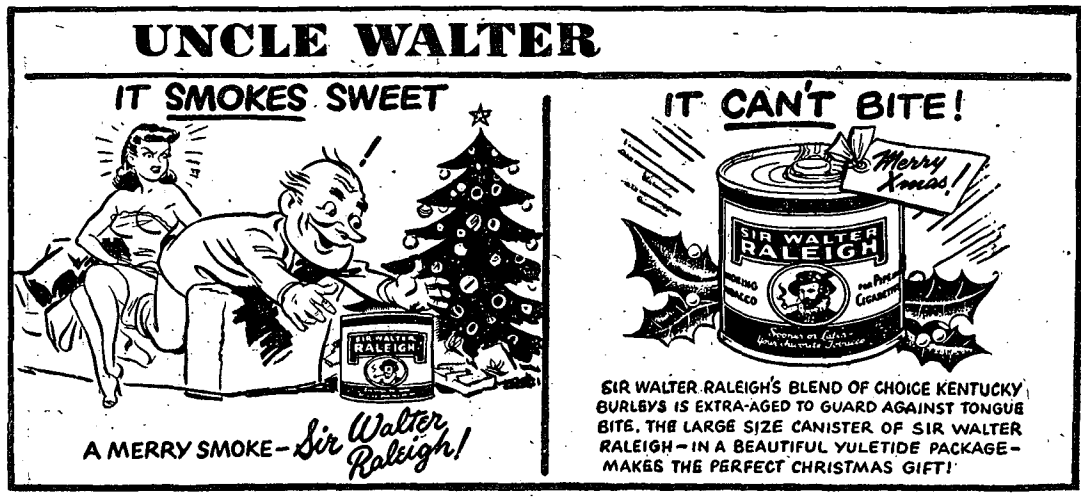
UNCLE WALTER
IT SMOKES SWEET
A MERRY SMOKE—Sir Walter Raleigh!
IT CAN'T BITE!
Merry Xmas!
SIR WALTER RALEIGH
SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S BLEND OF CHOICE KENTUCKY BURLEYS IS EXTRA-AGED TO GUARD AGAINST TONGUE BITE. THE LARGE SIZE CANISTER OF SIR WALTER RALEIGH—IN A BEAUTIFUL YULETIDE PACKAGE—MAKES THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS GIFT!

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dialect of Gozashtandou that Althea, despite her conscientious struggle with that language, could hardly make out. As soon as they had left Majbur they had reverted to their native costume, consisting solely of a coating of grease. After the first half-hour Althea found that she no longer noticed their nudity. The grease gave the brawny skipper the look of a fine bronze statue, an effect aggravated by the faintly greenish Krishnan complexion.

The little merchantman wallowed sluggishly under her overload through a cross-swell. As the *Labághti* pitched, Althea's view of the rear between sail and ship alternated between sea and sky, with a glimpse of fading Zamba in between as the poop rose and fell.

Althea had known herself to be a good sailor from Terran experience. Since coming aboard some of the clouds of despondency had lifted from her soul. But for her fear of Gorchakov and doubt about her future she might almost have been said to be enjoying herself. The relaxation, the seemingly aimless wandering of the ship among the fairy-tale islands of this fancical planet, suited her temperament, which had a weakness for imaginative roaming in search of delectable chimeras.

Once she had thought to find her unknown goal in self-sacrificing service to her mother. Then she had turned to the hope of the primly abstract heaven of Ecumenical Monotheism, a powerful syncretic sect combining Judaic, Christian and Islamic elements and founded by Getulio Cão after the third and last World War. Now, however, the catastrophic absence of Bishop Harichand Raman had somewhat soured her on his church. She was just as glad to be still sailing under her own name, and not the alternative one, such as "Piety" or "Chastity," which the bishop was to have conferred upon her when he gave her her assignment. (While the latter would have been accurate enough, not even the unworldly Althea Merrick was determined to remain in that estimable state forever.)

Still, if Bishop Raman had materialized upon the *Labághti* and given her her assignment, her overdeveloped conscience would have forced her to obey. . . .

BAHR, endowed like Althea with a sea-going constitution, leaned against one of the crates lashed to the deck and smoked his pipe. The three Terrans had come aboard just as the crew were stowing a great mass of crates about whose contents Captain Memzadá was ostentatiously secretive. There had been too many of these crates to fit into the hold, so that the overflow had been stowed on deck.

Brian Kirwan, looking almost as green as a Krishnan, staggered forward.

"Feeling better?" said Althea.

"Ha! It takes more than a touch of sea to down the great Brian Kirwan for long, though I curse the man who first tied two logs together to make a boat." The poet shook his head and ran a hand across his forehead. " 'Twill pass. Now, isn't that the sight for you?" He waved an arm towards the sunset and broke into gurgling Gaelic noises. "That's a bit of a poem I've just composed, in Irish, of course. All about how the isle of Zamba sits in the evening on the smaragdine Sadabao Sea, but for all its chlorophyllic greenery it's not Eire, and wouldn't be even if it was, because the Ireland that Zamba isn't doesn't exist except in the poetical imagination—if I make myself clear."

Althea did not think that Kirwan had made himself clear, but refrained from telling him so lest he be incited to harangue her for a whole hour. The samples of his verse that he had quoted had impressed Althea as pretty amateurish efforts. In fact she was becoming convinced that Kirwan was no more than an eccentric idler who claimed nonexistent poetic talents to justify an otherwise useless existence.

But Kirwan continued s m u g l y,

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"Poignant, isn't it? But at least Zamba has some color and poetry left to it, unlike my native land, which shows the same dull-gray uniformity as the rest of the Earth. The back of me hand to democracy! We need kings and nobolity again, a system with a soul."

Althea said: "That's all very well if you happen to be one of the nobles—"

"And who could deny the rank to the great Brian Kirwan? But who can write serious poetry about some ninny passing a civil-service examination so as to be hired as a clark by some stupid board or commission?"

"Ignore him," said Bahr. "As a poet he feels obliged to affect such attitudes."

"You crass Philistine you!" sneered Kirwan. "By God, if I'd known what a dull, stupid, tedious fossil of a man was going to make my life hideous with boredom, I'd have waited for the next ship."

Bahr urbanely continued, "As I was about to explain, modern psychometry is not a theory but a well-tested body of fact. Also it is not anti-democratic, at least not more than the actual human race."

"How do you mean, the human race?" said Althea.

"Well, after all these years of education and beautiful constitutions and world government, most human beings still regard public office as an excuse to enrich themselves, reward their friends, and exterminate their enemies. And anyway democracy is not the same as equalitarianism—"

"It's wasting your time you are," said Kirwan. "The girl knows it all already. Got the Truth from her demented prophet."

ALTHEA protested: "Everybody seems to think that because I'm a missionary I must be some sort of grim fanatic. Now really, I don't know an awful lot about the fine points of Getulio Cão's theology, though I had to accept the fundamentals when I joined the mission. But I can still think for myself."

"Good for you," said Bahr. "How did you happen to get into this line?"

"Oh, my mother died and I felt useless and alone. I'd taken care of her for years and didn't have any good ready way to make a living."

"What had she lived on?" said Bahr with a keen look.

"She had money, but she left it all to my brothers. All I got was a useless patch of land near Lake George."

"The shame of it!" cried Kirwan. "Couldn't you sue 'em? Or don't they have laws to protect heirs in America?"

"Oh, I couldn't sue my *family*!" said Althea.

"By God, I could; or I could bounce a dornick off their ugly heads if the occasion called for it. You've got no guts at all, girl. But that doesn't tell us how you became a missionary lady."

"Well, I wanted to do some good in the galaxy. So, having been brought up an Ecumenical Monotheist, I went around to our presbyter, and he sent me to training-school and they sent me out here."

Kirwan said: "What ails the young men of Earth? Are they blind that one of 'em didn't carry you off to bear his sons, and you so beautiful and all?"

"Brian!" said Althea severely. "No, I suppose I might as well tell you. I've got three brothers—"

"Your people must have had a high genetic rating,' said Bahr, "four children to be allowed."

"They did; my father was a brilliant New York lawyer. But after he died my brothers discouraged my getting married every way they could. *They* didn't want to take care of Mother, who was a difficult character, and as long as I was single they figured I'd do it. So when I had a boy-friend in, they'd go out of their way to make him uncomfortable, and when he'd gone they'd work on me, telling me what a stupid boor he was. And now I suppose it's too late."

"Ah, it's never too late," said Kirwan. "Sure, if I didn't have other plans I'd

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have a try at marrying you myself, or at least a damned good seduction." He grinned lewdly, but Althea had come to accept such antics as part of his jester's personality. "However, I suppose your religion protects you against such dangers, darling?"

"It's supposed to," said Althea. "Have you a religion?"

"Well, now a famous Irish scholar, Stephen Mackenna it was, said the best religion for a man to have is to be a bad Catholic. But I'm not even that."

"What then?"

"I call myself a pseudo-neo-pagan."

"A what?"

" 'Tis not surprising you never heard of it, for I'm the only one. I dabble in all the old cults and sects, not taking 'em seriously, but using 'em to stimulate the poetic imagination. You ought to try it."

THE day died. Kirwan yawned and said: "Time we turned in, darling, unless you want to watch the three moons chase each other."

Althea said: "I think I'll sleep on deck. I can't stand the smell of that little cabin, especially of that rancid grease the captain and the mate wear."

Kirwan asked. "Aren't you afraid one of the sailors will misconstrue you?"

"Oh, nobody bothers a skinny old maid like me."

"It gets colder than you might think," said Bahr.

"Well, could one of you boys lend me a jacket?"

"Sure, sure," said Kirwan.

He went aft to the small cabin below the poop-deck and presently returned with a windbreaker, which he gave Althea. Then he and Bahr said goodnight and departed. As they entered the cabin Althea heard Captain Memzadá burst into angry speech, and from the few words that she caught she inferred that he was scolding Bahr for going below while smoking. Bahr murmured an apology and knocked his pipe out against the rail. Althea glimpsed a cloud of red sparks flying off into the dusk, and soon feel asleep herself.

She dreamt that she was bound to a stake on the island of Zesh. Brian Kirwan and a gorilla-like native wearing an evening hat were arguing as to what should be done to her, while a swarm of naked Roussellians coated with grease capered around the stake to the beat of a hollow-log drum. Kirwan wanted to burn her because that was how it was done in the rites of the ancient Numidian god Baal-Club, while the native (like a tailed and hairier Gorchakov) wanted to save her to found a dynasty with. Gottfried Bahr was proving them both wrong by scientific arguments, Kirwan because she was too green to burn and the Zau because he and she would not prove interfertile.

"That what you think!" said the native. "I show you!" And he started to tear her clothes off.

She awoke to find that her clothes were being, if not torn off, at least taken off. A grease-clad Daryau sailor squatted over her, fumbling with unfamiliar buttons.

Althea Merrick pressed her palms to the deck, pushing herself back against the gunwale. For the moment she was too frightened and confused to move or speak; dream and reality were commingled in her mind.

The sailor grinned and muttered. Althea caught the impression that he was explaining that he had never had a good look at a Terran female and wanted to see how one was made. However, his further intentions were obvious to any observant eye.

Althea braced herself to roll away from the sailor, filling her lungs to shout. Quick as a flash the Daryau clamped a greasy hand over Althea's mouth, forcing her head back down into the angle between the gunwale and the deck.

With a thrill of horror Althea felt herself held down by the fellow's iron muscles. Worse yet, something in her own nature seemed to be urging her

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not to resist; to relax and enjoy whatever was to ensue.

Then Althea's strength returned. She sank her teeth into the dirty palm and, as it jerked back, she got one hand entwined in the sailor's hair and pulled herself into a sitting position. She screamed and grabbed for the Krishnan's throat.

"Beqani!" snarled the sailor in a stage-whisper, his voice hoarse from Althea's earnest if only partly successful efforts to strangle him. He aimed a blow at her.

They were still wrestling around when footsteps drummed on the deck and a forest of legs sprouted around Althea, shutting off the moonlight. Hands tore the sailor loose and hauled him to his feet. Althea got up, dizzy from the sailor's mauling and cuffing.

"What's this rogue doing to you, darling?" roared Brian Kirwan.

Althea explained. Bahr translated to Captain Memzadá, who gave a terse command. The concupiscent mariner was tied to the mainmast so tightly that he could not have escaped in a century. When he was safely bound, Kirwan emitted a shout:

"Now I've got you, you dirty heathen!"

And he kicked the sailor in the shins and punched his face, beating the Krishnan's head back and forth against the mast until the captain stepped between them and pushed Kirwan roughly away from his victim, growling in his own speech. Bahr said:

"He says he will punish him in the morning, but you are to let him alone."

"So it's taking the side of the dirty louse he is? Why you—" Here Kirwan shouted several obscenities at the captain, but as they were in English the latter merely stared, standing grimly with a hand on his knife. Kirwan turned towards the cabin, muttering to himself.

Bahr said to Althea: "Now had you better not some sleep in the cabin get?"

Althea nodded mutely and followed her companions back to the poop. Kirwan, his outburst over, said:

"Sure, if every man you meet is going to tear the clothes off you, you'd better wear things with zippers. At least it'll save the clothes."

Bahr said: "The zippers would save her clothes, maybe, but not that which to her appears more valuable."

"A much overrated commodity," said Kirwan. "Of negotiable value only in patriarchal societies."

Althea shook her head. "Earth was never like this!"

V

NEXT morning Althea lay on her pallet, too sore and miserable to move, when a change in the motion of the ship aroused her. She came out to see the *Labághti* hove to and captain, passengers, and crew gathered around the mainmast. The captain gave an order, and a couple of sailors untied the prisoner. Gottfried Bahr said in a low voice, "The captain told them to—ah—I don't know how you would say it; *zu kielholen ihn.*"

"Keelhaul him!" said Kirwan.

"What's that?" asked Althea. "I've heard the word—"

"Sh!" said Kirwan. "You'll see."

While the Terrans were speaking, grinning sailors tied four long ropes to the limbs of the accused. Then three of them hustled him to the bow while a fourth walked aft along the rail paying out one of the ropes over the side as he went.

The sailors holding the remaining three ropes then seized the culprit and threw him off the bow. His shriek was cut off by the splash.

The sailor who had walked to the stern, standing braced, began hauling in his rope, so that the victim was drawn under water and back along the ship's keel. Two of the rope-holders walked slowly aft, each leaning over the rail, one on each side and holding his rope, so that the sailor was kept centered un-

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der the keel and did not float out to the surface on one side or the other. Meanwhile the remaining rope-man remained at the bow paying out his rope as the sailor was pulled away from him.

Bahr said: "There is an easier way to haul him from one side of the ship to the other, but the captain means to make an example of him."

"But he'll drown!" cried Althea, unhappily feeling that she ought to stop these brutal proceedings but not knowing how.

"Hush, girl," said Kirwan. " 'Twill be small loss."

Bahr said in his dry, detached way: "I think that the punishment is timed so that the victim can just survive if he keeps his head and takes a long breath before being drawn under. But I doubt if this one so much presence of mind has."

"If he were that smart," said Kirwan, "he'd not have got into trouble in the first place. At least, darling, you can't complain you don't attract the men. First Gorchakov, now this fella."

In time the sailor appeared at the stern of the ship. Two Krishnans hauled the body up over the stern. It lay still on the poop-deck with water running out of its blue-green hair and off its greasy skin. Althea approached it fearfully; she had never before seen a man or a humanoid who had died by violence. She said, "He might have a little life in him. We ought to try artificial respiration."

"It is best not to interfere," said Bahr.

"Besides," said Kirwan, "what d'you want to bring the bastard back for? Good riddance, I'd say."

"No, that's against my principles," said Althea.

SHE bent over the body, from which the sailors were untying the ropes. Though not a leader type and accustomed by long subservience to her family to playing a passive rôle, Althea could be driven by her conscience to acts of outstanding initiative. If the Earthmen would not help, she would have to do her duty. She tugged and heaved the bulky body into prone position, straddled it, and began pumping air into its lungs. An outburst of questions from Captain Memzadá was answered by Bahr, who explained to Althea:

"I have told him that it is a religious rite. He says that now he knows that all Terrans are mad, but he will not interfere."

Althea continued pumping until she got tired, when the Earthmen, shamed into action, relieved her. Bahr had just taken over from Kirwan when the corpse began to stir, groan and cough. The rest of the ship's company cast startled glances at the Terrans and edged away from them.

Althea and her companions finally left the sailor huddled in a corner of the poop-deck, collapsed but alive. The captain looked at them with an expression that might have signified puzzlement, awe or contempt, as they walked past him standing at the tiller. For the *Labághti* had long since been under way again.

Later that same day Althea, sitting in the bow in a reverie, was approached by Bahr, Kirwan, and the revived sailor. Bahr said, "This man is very perplexed and would like to ask you some questions."

"All right," said Althea.

"First, he wishes to know if your reviving him meant that you changed your mind and decided that you wanted to go to the races with him after all. The last expression is, I believe a euphemism."

"Of course not. I revived him because I considered death too severe a punishment for what he had done."

Bahr and the sailor conversed, and then the former said: "Do you mean, he says, that you went to all that trouble over a mere question of justice?"

"That's right."

The sailor shook his head, and Bahr

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said. "He wants to know if you wish to be friends with him?"

"No."

Bahr told the sailor, and Kirwan added a few words in his own broken Gozashtandou, explaining: "I told the begger if he so much as came within reach of you, I'd take his hide off personally and use it to bind my next book."

TIME slipped by the *Labághti* plodded her way eastward among the many islands of the Sadabao Sea. Althea turned brown from the sun and even put on a little weight, while Bahr lectured her on the theory and technique of intelligence-testing. The hopeless trapped feeling, that had come upon her when she stepped off the spaceship at Novorecife and learned that Bishop Raman was away, subsided. She did not however get over a tendency to scan the western horizon for the sail of a pursuing ship.

The three Terrans were standing in a cluster at the poop-deck rail and watching the island of Jerud slide below the horizon when Althea asked:

"Gottfried, how are you going to test Záva?"

Bahr lit his pipe. "That depends on the mental level that I find. On the ordinary Mangioni scale, which takes the consolidated averages for the whole human race as one hundred per cent, the tailless Krishnans average 102 and the Koloftuma seventy-eight, so one would normally test the latter by the tests used for pre-adolescent human beings. But if the rumors be true, I may have to use the Takamoto genius-test."

"Ha!" said Kirwan. "And what does an intelligence-test measure? Why, the ability to pass an intelligence-test, nothing more!"

Althea asked: "What's happened on Zá to get the Interplanetary Council and the Terran World Federation so excited?"

"Well," explained Bahr, "thirty years ago, Terran time, the Záva were living the same sort of savage lives that the tailed Krishnans of Koloft and Fossanderan still do. The other Sadabao Islanders raided them to catch the young for slaves, the adults being too intractable. But they had never been able to conquer Zá, not so much because of the resistance of the Záva, whose sticks and stones could not have done much against armored men with swords and crossbows, as because of the shape of the island, which like Zesh is surrounded by steep cliffs with only two landing places.

"Then word began coming out that the Záva were rapidly changing their way of life. In a few years they acquired a form of writing, a well-organized government, a system of law, and are said to have constructed a lot of well-planned and spacious buildings instead of the wretched hovels of stones and mud. The latest report has it that they are building a small but serviceable navy of rowing galleys of advanced design. Now, these things do not happen so quickly of their own accord."

"Do you suppose there's some Earthman on Zá teaching them?" asked Althea.

"I do not think so," replied Bahr. "I made inquiries of Mr. Gorchakov, who showed me what careful track his office has kept of all the Earthmen on Krishna. Moreover when the Saint-Rémy treatment was introduced, the authorities at Novorecife had great success in getting these Earthmen to come in and submit to treatment."

"I should think some would have refused," said Althea.

"Ah, but Novorecife can always cut off their longevity-doses; that's how the technological blockade was as successful as it was before the Saint-Rémy treatment. Few Earthmen cared to jeopardize their extended life-span for the sake of a quick profit among the Krishnans. And the only record of Earthmen on Zá in the last half-century is a missionary couple who are known to have been eaten."

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Althea winced. Bahr added: "There is said to be a brilliant chief named Yuruzh directing their efforts. He at least would be worth testing."

Kirwan spoke: "Gottfried my boy, wasn't there a fellow on Earth who treated some monkeys so they became as intelligent as men only more so?"

"Yes, that was J. Warren Hill, an American psychologist—unless like many of his colleagues you consider him a charlatan. And it was apes, not monkeys."

"But it worked, didn't it?" asked Kirwan.

"His system? Yes and no. He had a system of hypnotherapy called Pannoëtics, developed from some heterodox schools of twentieth-century psychological thought."

"What did it do?" asked Althea.

"Pannoëtics claims to clear up all the traumata not only in the nervous system but in the germ plasm as well. Of course orthodox psychology does not yet admit that an alteration to the soma can effect the germ plasm, but there is still some inconclusive evidence pointing in that direction. Well, the reason the original systems of hypnotherapy did not work was, it is supposed, that the human race had been civilized so long that the ancestors of all present-day men have been subjected to frustrations and similar traumata for hundreds of generations. So one must by one's hypnotherapy cure not only the man but a long line of ancestors too. Therefore when Hill tried his system on human beings, it simply made most of them completely and hopelessly psychotic."

Kirwan said: "Ha! And doesn't that prove the Roussellians right about your rotten decadent civilization?"

IGNORING him, Bahr continued: "But Hill thought, if the germ plasm of human beings is hopelessly traumatized, that of chimpanzees would not be, as they have never been civilized. So he modified his system for application to chimpanzees, with astounding results. He gave them an intelligence-rating, on the Mangioni scale, of 134—which puts them up with the greatest geniuses among Earthmen."

Althea said, "I should think that would be fine; you'd have ready-made geniuses to solve all human problems."

"It did not work out that way. Having no civilized culture, these apes had none of the inhibitions and cultural attitudes that make civilized life possible. In personality they were still apes—excitable, irresponsible, mischievous, destructive, sexually promiscuous and emotionally unstable."

"Why just apes?" growled Kirwan. "Sure, you've just described most human beings!"

"It is a matter of degree, my friend. Anyway, it soon became obvious that these ape-geniuses were a menace, because they used their intelligence not to help humanity, but to plot to enslave mankind to a race of super-apes. At that point the World Federation forbade Hill to go on with his experiments. They did not destroy the apes already treated, as that might have been considered genocide."

Althea interjected, "Might Hill have come to Krishna?"

"No. One ape, thwarted in his plot to impose an ape-aristocracy on the world, used his genius secretly to manufacture a large quantity of nitroglycerine, and one day Hill's laboratory in Cuba, Hill himself, and his whole ape-colony blew up with a frightful explosion. Naturally I at once thought of a connection between Hill and the events on Zá, but in spite of all my detective-work I have not been able to find any. The few tailed Krishnans who have been allowed to visit Earth either died there or returned to Krishna no more intelligent than they left it."

Kirwan glanced about and said in a lowered voice, "Speaking of detective work, I found out what this cargo is. I pried open one of the cases and peeked."

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"What is it?" said Althea.

"Weapons."

Bahr spoke up, "Do you mean Terran weapons, guns and the like, such as some Earthmen have at times attempted into Krishna to smuggle?"

"No, native stuff: swords and helmets and things. I wonder if the Dasht of Darya is about to enlarge his realm?"

Bahr shrugged. "It does not matter to us. These petty kings and nobles are always fighting their little wars. Last year, I am told, a philosopher of Katai-Jhogorai issued a manifesto calling for one global government for Krishna, but the Krishnans paid no more attention than our own ancestors would a few centuries ago."

Soon after Jerud had disappeared, another land-mass appeared ahead. Kirwan in the bow pointed it out to Althea, "That's Zá, with Zesh in front of it."

As the ship neared the land, the smaller island of Zesh seemed to detach itself from the main mass. Zesh lay southwest of Zá, and like it was largely surrounded by tall cliffs, above which could be seen the greens and browns and mauves and purples of Kirshnan vegetation.

Althea looked at Zesh, and beyond to dark Zá with its crown of forest; an island somewhere between Staten Island and Long Island in size. She wondered how it would have been if Bishop Raman had ordered her to land on Zá and plunge into its forests full of man-eating tailed Krishnans.

A Krishnan voice murmured apologetically behind them. Althea turned to see the sailor who had been keelhauled. The fellow stood twisting his feet and hanging his head as if about to confess that he had eaten his mother, but finally he held out a folded sheet of Krishnan paper. He spoke, slowly so that Althea could understand most of it:

"This is for you, my lady. I pray ye, read it not ere ye've landed on yonder isle."

Althea took the paper, not knowing quite how to handle the situation. She supposed that it was some sort of written apology—perhaps even a love-letter. With an inarticulate mumble the sailor turned and scampered back to his duties.

"Read it," said Kirwan.

"No, he asked me not to," said Althea, and put the paper away.

Captain Memzadá barked commands. The ship altered course, the sails swinging to match the turn. The cliffs came nearer. Althea could now see a long stretch of beach on the south side of the island. The water in front of it seemed to be shallow for quite a way out.

o

UP ON the top of the forest-crowned plateau or mesa, a gleam caught Althea's eye. She had a dim impression of a building with a dome or tower of some shiny material, but the structure was too well hidden by the trees to make out clearly. And then the gleam faded.

The *Labághti* hove to and put its little ship's boat over the side. As the dinghy was not big enough to carry all three Terrans and their baggage, Bahr explained, "The captain says that we three should go ashore first, and he will by a second trip the luggage send."

"Oh, no he don't!" said Kirwan. "What's to stop him from dropping us off and sailing away with our gear? Tell him to take one or two of us plus some of the baggage, and a second trip for the rest."

"I never thought of that," said Bahr with a startled expression, and gave the order. The captain grunted sourly but complied.

Bahr and Althea went ashore in the first boat. The two rowers maneuvered the little cockle-shell past several ominous-looking rocks. The combers got higher as they neared the shelving beach, tossing the boat alarmingly. Althea, sitting beside Bahr, gripped the gunwale as a near-breaker tossed them high in the air. As the next one loomed behind them, the rowers dug in and bent their oars, so that as the wave came along the boat coasted in on its forward face with a rush. The wave broke

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thunderously on either side of them, somehow failing to swamp them, and then they struck the beach with a crunch of sand.

Althea rose and climbed over the bow onto the wet sand. The sailors threw them their baggage, pushed off, nosed up with a mighty splash through a breaker, and rowed quickly out to the ship again.

Althea looked around her. There was nothing in sight but the beach, the sea in front of it with the *Labághti* stationary aginst the sky, and behind the beach the multi-colored forest, sloping sharply up to the plateau that occupied nearly all the island.

She thrust her hands into the pockets of her wrinkled khaki trousers (which by diligent use of needle and thread she had altered to fit her) and felt the paper that the sailor had pressed upon her. She took it out and unfolded it.

The paper was covered with native Krishnan writing, very uneven, as if the writer were barely literate. Both the dialect and the alphabet were different from the standard Gozashtandou of which Althea possessed a meager command. She puzzled out a few words of the scrawl and finally handed the paper to Bahr, saying:

"Can you make this out?"

Bahr had been watching the boat returning to the *Labághti*. Brian Kirwan's burly figure could just be seen perching on the rail of the ship, which rocked gently in the seaway, her sails luffing. The psychologist examined the paper.

"I fear that I do not know much more than you," he said, but he nevertheless brought out a pad, a pencil, and a pocket dictionary. He wiped his glasses and sat down on his barracks-bag to puzzle the missive out.

The boat containing Brian Kirwan bobbed shoreward. With a final rush it surfboarded in and Kirwan jumped out. The sailors unloaded the remaining baggage and started out again.

"Well," said Kirwan. "Here we are, me buckos, and I hope we don't find we're all alone. I wrote the Roussellians I was coming."

Bahr raised his head. "I think I have it, though I had to guess at some of the words. It reads like this:

> To Mistress Althea: Since you have saved my life, I am obligated to help you. My sovereign, the Dasht of Darya, plans to conquer Zá and Zesh in order to enslave all the tailed ones. You had therefore best leave these islands if you do not wish to be slain in the fighting.

Bahr refolded the paper. "The poor fellow could barely write, so his spelling —*auf!*" he cried, the purport of the message penetrated his mind belatedly. "That means us! We had better get off here!"

Bahr began to wave his arms towards the *Labághti*. But at that minute the ship's sails filled and she swung and plunged off towards the east.

"*Ohé!*" yelled Bahr, running up and down the beach. "Come back!" he screamed in Gozashtandou.

Althea and Kirwan shouted and waved too, but the ship continued on her way without sign of recognition. When she was hull-down they gave up and stood, arms hanging limply, watching the red-and-yellow striped sails slide below the horizon.

VI

PENSIVELY pulling his lip, Gottfried Bahr said: "I suppose the thing to do is to explore this island until we find someone."

"'Twill not be necessary," said Kirwan. "Here comes my gang now."

A curious sound had reached Althea's ears: a thin high piping, as if somebody were blowing across the tops of an assortment of small bottles. There was a rustling and a waving of branches, and there burst from the vegetation that lined the beach a singular procession.

First came a short, stocky man with a nut-brown skin and the flat slit-eyed face of the East Asiatic, with perhaps a little Brazilian Indian thrown in. A great length of coarse brown cloth re-

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sembling burlap was wound about his body and held in place by safety-pins. Sandals shod his feet and a wreath of purple leaves rested upon his coarse graying black hair. He helped himself along with a staff. Althea thought that while a man of these antecedents had as good a right as anybody else to dress up as an ancient Greek if he wished, the result was hardly worth the effort.

After this person came others, similarly clad. A young woman carried a bowl of fruit; a young man blew into a syrinx, producing the piping sound. There were about twenty altogether, the men bearded in varying degrees.

The wreathed man strode across the scorching sand to where the three new arrivals stood. In Portuguese he addressed them, "Good-day, senhora and senhores. Which of you is Brian Kirwan?"

"That'll be me," said Kirwan.

"In the name of the great Jean Jacques Rousseau, I welcome you to the Isle of Freedom. I was formerly known as Diogo Kuroki, but here my name is Zeus. You, senhor, shall be known as Orpheus. And who are these, more recruits?"

"No," said Kirwan, and introduced his companions.

"Oh, scientists," said Kuroki, as though Althea and Bahr were lower organisms cast up by the sea in an advanced state of decay. "Welcome to the ranks of the natural men, Senhor Orpheus."

The piper tootled. The girl with the bowl of fruit presented it to Kirwan. Another Roussellian produced another wreath and placed it on Kirwan's head. Then everybody shook Kirwan's hand as Kuroki introduced them: Senhor Hermes, Senhora Aspasia, Senhor Platon, Senhor Dionysos, Senhorita Nausikaa, and so on.

Bahr finally spoke up: "*Por favor,* Senhor Zeus, as we—Senhorita Althea Merrick and I—may be here for some time, we should like to make some arrangement for living."

"Nobody is hindering you from living, senhor," said Kuroki.

"I mean for eating and sleeping," said Bahr with audible irritation.

"We do not run a hotel," said Kuroki. "If you like, however, you may work for your keep."

"Work?" said Bahr, frowning. "I can pay a reasonable rate. . . ."

"Your money is no good to us, senhor. We are cut off from all contaminating commercial contacts here, and rely entirely upon our own efforts. What we do need is assistance in wringing a living from the soil of Zesh."

"What sort of assistance?" said Bahr.

"That depends upon the need of the moment. For instance the crop of badr that we planted last ten-night is just coming up, so I imagine that you would be put to weeding."

BAHR exchanged grim looks with Althea. Kirwan, his mouth full of the tunest that he had taken from the bowl, was chattering in his horrible Portuguese with a couple of the better-looking younger women, rendering them helpless with laughter.

Kuroki raised his voice, "My children, let us return to Elysion!"

The piper began to tweetle. Kuroki, moving his staff at arm's length, strode majestically back towards the forest. The others fell into line.

Althea, seeing that she and Bahr would be ignored, picked up her bag and hurried to the head of the line.

"Senhor Kuroki," she said.

The cult-leader frowned. "Senhorita, it was clearly explained to you that my name is Zeus."

"Senhor Zeus, then. We learned something just as we left the ship that should interest you."

"*Sim?*"

Althea told Kuroki about the note from the sailor disclosing the impending attack upon Zá and Zesh by the Daryava. She showed him the note. Kuroki frowned in thought for some seconds, then said:

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"It might or might not be true. Your sailor friend may have merely wished to seem to discharge his debt to you and so invented this tale."

"But there were those crates of weapons. . . ."

"Oh, the island nations of the Sadabao are always buying weapons from Majbur, which is a great manufacturing center, whereas the islands are mostly without mineral resources. Moreover, senhorita, even if the story were true, I don't think that the Dasht of Darya would dare to land on Zesh so long as we are here, for fear of becoming embroiled with Novorecife. While I try to keep our relationships with decadent Terran civilization to a minimum, I cannot deny that Terran prestige among the Krishnans is convenient at times." Kuroki allowed a faint smile to light his impassive face for a second.

"But aren't you going to evacuate the island?"

"Senhorita, if you knew the troubles that I have had and the bureaucratic obstacles that I have overcome in getting this colony established, you would not make such a silly suggestion. Live or die, here we will stay."

"Do you propose to fight the Daryava, then?" asked Althea.

"Of course not. In the first place we should only annoy them and assure our extermination—assuming that this fanciful invasion of yours does come to pass. In the second, war is against our principles. Natural man lived in peace and friendship before he was corrupted by the evils of civilization."

"How about warning the Záva?"

"No. We will remain strictly neutral, so that nobody can accuse us of taking sides."

Althea fell silent. Kuroki's statement about the peacefulness of primitive man was not in accordance either with the teachings of Ecumenical Monotheism or with the scientific account of prehistory of which she had received a smattering in her school days and about which she had heard more lately from Gottfried Bahr. But she did not think it wise to argue with the man who controlled the food supply, especially as he seemed to be one who took both his opinions and himself with the utmost seriousness.

The procession wound up a steep trail from the beach to the plateau. Then it continued along a level through the trees for a half-kilometer and came out upon a large cleared area. In the midst of the fields, Althea could see a clump of shade-trees that had been left standing when the area was cleared, and among the bases of these a cluster of huts.

PEOPLE were visible—naked, as Kirwan had asserted, but not dancing Greek dances. On the contrary they were working busily in their fields and gardens, hoeing, raking and otherwise tilling the soil of Zesh. As Althea came closer she saw that they were all burned dark brown—all, that is, but those whose racial skin-color was that hue to begin with. They glanced up as the procession, the pipe-player still tootling, marched in among the huts, but returned to their work with furtive haste.

One of the structures was a lot larger than the rest. As they passed its open door, Althea saw the backs of a number of children and concluded that this was the school and meeting-house.

"Here," said Diogo Kuroki, indicating a hut. "This one is empty. You newcomers may occupy it for the nonce."

Althea looked at Kuroki in slight alarm. Such a living-arrangement would complete the ruin of whatever shreds of reputation that she still bore among the missionaries of Ecumenical Monotheism. She asked, "Couldn't you put me in with one of the women?"

"Why?"

"I'm not married to either of these gentlemen."

"Married? We don't bother with such artificial formalities, senhorita. This is the best that we can do; if you prefer to sleep in a tree you are welcome to do so. As soon as we get some more houses finished and Senhor Orpheus chooses a

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mate, he will no doubt move out, and then you and Senhor Bahr can decide what you wish to do. In any case we do not encourage the celibate life here—"

Kuroki's speech was interrupted by a shout, and presently two running cultists rounded the corner of one of the huts. The second was chasing the first with a hoe.

Kuroki shouted "Stop!" but the pair kept on without heeding, the second swinging his implement at the head of the first. As they passed out of sight around another hut, Kuroki said, "What are they fighting about this time?"

One of the girls spoke up, "They are rivals for the love of Senhora Psyche."

"I thought Psyche was Aristotle's mate?" said Kuroki.

"She is, but they hope to persuade her to leave him for one of them."

"I'll fine them a week's leisure for behaving in such a civilized manner! He might break a good hoe. All right, you newcomers, you shall have a quarter-hour to move in, and then report to Senhor Diomedes here for work. Remember the rules: no shirking, no irregularities or non-coöperation, no unauthorized contact with Záva or other outsiders. That is all."

The procession broke up, the participants trailing off about their various concerns. Althea, followed by Bahr and Kirwan, entered the designated hut, a one-room affair with a dirt floor and four crude beds.

Kirwan, setting down his bag, said, "Bedad, the triumphal welcome didn't last long."

"It seems to me," said Bahr, "that you will be compelled to work harder and longer here than you ever were on Earth."

"Oh, that's because they don't appreciate my genius yet. Just wait."

A QUARTER-HOUR later the three were out in the central plaza again awaiting the arrival of Senhor Diomedes, a stout, bald, and uncommonly muscular man with a great mass of curly graying beard sweeping his hairy chest.

Presently Diomedes appeared without his ceremonial cloak, accompanied by two others. He said, "Senhor Orpheus, our irrigation-water supply is low, so you shall spend the afternoon filling the tank from the well-bucket. Senhor Achilles will show you how." Kirwan groaned. "Senhor Gottfried, your help is required by Senhor Thales, our carpenter. Senhorita Althea, the badr-field needs weeding. Come along, please."

Althea followed the overseer out to the field, where he pressed a hoe into her hand.

"Now," he said, "you simply walk down one row and up the other, and wherever you see any plant but a shoot of badr you hoe it up, Go ahead—*hey*, that's a badr-plant you destroyed! Be careful!"

"I can't tell the difference," said Althea, to whom the mass of little green and brown and purple things all looked alike.

"Then I shall explain." Senhor Diomedes picked up the little seedling that Althea had ignorantly hoed up and pointed out its physical attributes, compared with those of the weeds. "Now when you come to one of these," he said, pulling up another plant, "you must tear it up by the roots, because it's so viable that if even a bit of root is left it will grow again. This kind you must collect and burn, because it will take root again if left lying on the ground. This kind you must be careful with, because it shoots out little poisoned darts when disturbed. They can make you quite sick. This one has a bladder that bursts, releasing a horrible stench, but it will not injure you. . . ."

After more instruction Althea thought that she had the hang of the job. Diomedes said:

"Good; I knew you were an intelligent—*look out!* You're getting too close to the badr, stupid!"

"Sorry," said Althea. "How long must I keep at this?" The hoe was already feeling heavy.

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"Until sunset. A bell will ring."

Althea let a small sigh escape. "That seems like a long working day."

"My dear young lady, did you think a colony like this can thrive on a pre-industrial basis with *less* work than in a mechanized society? On the contrary we have to work twice as hard to attain a much lower standard of living. We work from sunrise to sunset, with not more than one day in ten off, and hope that diseases or flocks of aqebats won't destroy our crops and starve us out."

Althea looked at the man. "What were you before you came here?"

"My name was Aaron Halevi, and I was the assistant manager of the Bank of Israel in Tel-Aviv. My wife ran away with an Egyptian weight-lifter, and here I am—*hey!*" Diomedes bounded up and down, his potbelly quivering. "Never whack at a stone that way! You'll break your hoe, and they're hard to replace. You pick the stone up and carry it to the edge of the field."

"Where do you get your tools?"

"We trade them from the Záva for falat-wine. They are building up quite an industry on their island. Hey, look there! You missed a weed!"

"Sorry. I thought Zeus said you were entirely self-sufficient?"

Halevi shrugged. "We do our best, but there's no local ore and no blacksmith."

"Do you like this better than the bank?" asked Althea.

"No comparison! Here one can be a natural man, free—that is," he lowered his voice, "we would be free if Zeus weren't such a damned autocrat. Some day," added Diomedes darkly, "there will be changes. Now, are there any more questions?"

"N-no, I think I know the job."

"You could work more comfortably without those silly clothes, you know."

"I suppose so, but as a missionary I can't follow your suggestion."

"Oho, so that's it! I'm a Neo-Buddhist myself. Call me if you need me."

Diomedes-Halevi strode off, and Althea presently heard his penetrating voice raised in reprimand from another part of the farm. She concentrated on her weeds.

It seemed as though the long Krishnan day would never end. Diomedes dropped by once to see how she was doing, grunted approvingly, and waddled off.

WHEN Roqir's disk finally touched the horizon, a bell rang from the village and the other workers streamed back towards the huts. Althea followed suit. She found Bahr and Kirwan washing their faces in their hut. Kirwan, who now wore the himation of the cult, was loud in his complaints:

"Glory be to Peter and Paul, I told 'em all about meself, but did it make any difference? Devil a bit! 'You work for your keep, me lad,' says the boss, so here's the great Brian Kirwan, a descendant of the high kings of Tara, sweating away like a bogtrotting peasant all afternoon. Just look at those blisters!"

"Look at mine!" said Bahr. "All day I have been pushing a saw and a plane, which I had not for forty years touched."

Althea spoke up, "I don't want to complain, but if everybody's going to brag about their blisters, here are mine."

"Ah, the black shame of it," said Kirwan. "And you, a delicately-nurtured young lady! However, there's one cure for that. In yonder bag are two bottles of the rarest old Irish potheen which I've been saving for such an occasion. I've dragged 'em clear from Earth, and with the freight rates what they are you'll practically be drinking liquid gold."

He began to rummage. After he had gone through the bag carefully several times without finding the whisky-bottles, he leaped to his feet, fists clenched, shouting curses like a madman and stamping the earthen floor like a child in a tantrum. His screams and roars brought Diogo Kuroki to the hut.

"Is something the matter, senhores?"

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"Is something the matter, he says! Listen to the man! Look, you squint-eyed heathen, what's become of them two bottles of liquor I had in my luggage?"

"Why, we took them out to add to our medical store."

"*What?*" shrieked Kirwan.

"Certainly. We do not allow the drinking of distilled liquors for pleasure here. Distillation is a process of the mechanized, industrialized world that we are getting away from. Our only social drinking is that of falat-wine which we ferment ourselves, and that only on Tendays."

Kirwan sat down on the edge of his bed, buried his face in his hands, and burst into tears. Kuroki-Zeus watched him impassively, then said, "Supper will be served in the Hall in a few minutes. A bell will ring," and departed.

VII

THE third day after Althea's arrival at Elysion happened to be Tenday, the last day of the Krishnan "week" and the traditional day of rest—a tradition that Diogo Kuroki had adopted for his colony.

At breakfast Althea said to Bahr and Kirwan, "At least I'll be able to let my blisters heal up."

Kirwan grunted agreement. "I hear the younger ones have games and dances and things, but I feel more like lying on my back and letting my genius operate."

Bahr said: "I fear, my friends, that if you a day of restful idleness expect, you are in for an unpleasant surprise."

"Huh?" said Kirwan.

"Pleasure, I understand, is compulsory here. With a keen eye to the welfare of his flock, Senhor Zeus has arranged a healthful program of games and sports, lest by an excess of leisure anyone be led into temptation."

"He can't! Damned if I'll—" began Kirwan, but the jangle of a bell interrupted him. Diogo Kuroki, looking like an Oriental god of bronze, rose at the head table and announced: "Everybody shall be at the playing-field in one hour. You are dismissed."

Kirwan snorted. "Let them try to find *me* when the hour comes round. It's far away I'll be. . . ."

But when the time arrived, Kirwan was there with the rest. Althea sat on the sidelines on a patch of grass-like plant that abounded on Krishna, though biologically it was more like a long-stemmed moss. Kirwan sat on one side and Bahr on the other, watching naked Roussellians run, wrestle, dance, throw heavy stones, and otherwise exert themselves. Althea found the sight interesting, though she could also see that it might become tedious with compulsory repetition.

After breakfast Kirwan had wandered off, he said to poetize, but when Althea and Bahr had taken this place the poet had immediately reappeared to sit on the other side of her. At first Althea had thought that he had changed his mind about defying the leader's orders, but then something in his manner suggested another motive.

Now that she thought of it, for several days each of these two had shown a tendency not to let Althea out of his sight in the other's company. If she had been a more observant girl she would have noticed this tendency even sooner.

Althea began to wonder what this increasing rivalry portended. The idea that both men were falling in love with her, or at least in lust, had not occurred to her until now, mainly because of her exaggerated modesty. And while it was very flattering, it was likely to result in unpleasant complications—say if they fell to fighting for her favor. Althea had never had two suitors come to blows over her and was both excited and appalled at the prospect. What on earth should one do under those circumstances?

"What are you lazy people doing?" said the loud voice of Diomedes-Halevi. "Get up! Everybody must take part.

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No idle spectators on Zesh."

"Go soak your head," said Kirwan. "I'm comfortable here and I'll not be moving for any reformed banker on Krishna."

"Would you prefer to be the bull in the ring?" said Halevi dangerously. "Hey, Pyrrhos! Aias!" A couple of muscular youths hastened over and stood awaiting orders.

"What's he talking about?" said Kirwan.

Althea explained, "I think he's threatening to put you in a circle of the young men and let one of them chase you with a paddle while you try to break out."

"Oh, hell!" groaned Kirwan, getting up. "You're as crazy over-organized as a Terran factory. Why can't you let a body be?"

Halevi said: "How about you two?"

Bahr replied: "I am not a member of your organization, my friend. If you should lay hands on either of us, I should consider myself to assault subjected and defend myself accordingly."

HALEVI grunted, but apparently decided not to force the issue. "Come along, Orpheus," he growled. "Which shall it be: square-dances, piggy-back jousting or wrestling? The races are over."

Althea missed Kirwan's mumbled reply, but a few minutes later she saw him stripped and grunting in a tangle of limbs with another wrestler of equal burl.

"Althea," said Bahr, "would you not like for a walk to go? We have been sitting here for a long, long time."

"All right," said Althea, though she suspected from his tone that the proposal was not made from sheer love of ambulation.

And so it proved. As soon as they were out of sight of the game-field, Bahr cleared his throat several times, as if trying to start a balky outboard motor. At last he said, "If I may take the liberty, dear Althea, I am telling you that my feelings for you are warmer than those of a scientist for an assistant. In fact I propose to you that as soon as some legal arrangements can be made, we enter into the matrimonial relationship."

"Why, thank you, Gottfried, but—"

"It would have considerable advantages. I am a person of regular habits and sober reliable character. Of course I admit that to some I might not seem very colorful—a little dull and pedantic, perhaps—but this is simply because I am a diffident man—the schizoid-cerebrotonic type—and I put up this façade of cold competence to conceal the fact. You see, I am good enough psychologist my own limitations to recognize. What do you think of the idea, my dear?"

"I'm afraid not. I like you, but. . . ."

"Please do not think that I am trying to save the cost of an assistant. Your salary would continue in any case. I would not apply unfair pressure to you either, knowing that a marriage entered into under those circumstances would not have the optimum probability of success."

"That's decent of you, but—no."

"No or just maybe?"

"Definitely no. I'm sorry."

Bahr sighed. "My analysis of your emotional tone did not give me much hope, but one must try. You are a very, very beautiful woman."

"Oh, it's just that you've been away from Earth so long," said Althea.

"That is not true, but we will argue it some other time. Shall we to the games return?"

They got back to find Kirwan nursing a black eye and complaining that his wrestling-opponent had fouled him by poking him in the optic with his knee.

"He claims I bit him," said Kirwan, "but pay no attention to the rascal. He stepped on my face, so it was natural that some of my teeth should scratch his foot up accidental-like."

"Who won?" asked Althea.

"What a silly question, *o cuisle!* The great Brian Kirwan, o' course, that was a professional wrestler before he got bit

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by the poetical bug."

"Come on, come on!" roared Diomedes-Halevi. "Everybody down to the beach. Don't lounge around; you'll catch cold!"

"God, don't a man ever get five minutes to himself?" muttered Kirwan, but he followed the others down the trail to the beach.

THE entire village—two hundred-odd people, over a third of them children—swarmed down on to the beach on which Althea had landed three days earlier. They told off one of their number to climb out on a projecting rock to watch the water for any of the man-eating monsters of the Sadabao Sea, while the rest shed their wrappings and plunged in.

Althea and Bahr sat down on the sand to watch the performance. Althea said, "Do you know what impresses me most? It's the high proportion of children and pregnant women."

"That is the natural ratio, when people have short life-expectancies and no methods of limitation."

"But I thought Kuroki provided his members with longevity-doses like other Terrans?"

"He does; that is one product of decadent civilization that they would not forego. But his medical service is rather crude. He has a lot of mixed-up ideas about nature's being the best doctor and so forth. However, at this rate he will soon have an overpopulation problem."

Althea looked up to see the barrel-bodied Kirwan dripping in front of her, saying, "Well, Althea darling, aren't you having a bath this day, and you so dirty and all?"

"I suppose I could use one," said Althea, conscious of a lavish coating of unirrigated soil of Zesh. Up on the plateau water was not so easily come by that it was used for such extravagant frivolities as bathing. She had thought of going down to the beach for a bath the previous night, but had been too tired and had also been afraid of losing her way. "But I haven't any bathing-suit."

"You've got your skin, the same as the rest of us. In a suit you'd be the conspicuous one."

"Why not?" said Bahr, rising and beginning to peel off his khaki shirt. "If Brian will his paunch expose, and I my poor thin skeleton of a physique, why should you to your Terran taboos adhere?"

Althea compromised by walking down to one extreme end of the beach, out of earshot if not out of sight of the Roussellians, and taking her bath there. Lacking soap or washrag she scrubbed the dirt off with sand. Then she waded out to breast-depth and swam powerfully on out until the lifeguard on the point of rock blew a whistle to warn her back.

She returned to her companions to find that the bony Bahr had just emerged from the water and was talking with Kirwan. The latter said, "Sit down, Althea, and listen. The mind of the great Brian Kirwan is so superior it's even willing to admit when it's made a mistake. I thought getting out and living the natural life would be easier; but I'm finding the simpler it is the harder it is. This sort of thing may be all right for a vacation, but the idea of spending years grubbing in the muck fair gives me the horrors. No meat, no whisky, and no tobacco after my present supply's gone. Nothing but these damned vegetables all tasting like turnips, morning, noon, and night. And what's an Irishman without his whisky and beefsteak?"

"You would at least train off some of that fat," murmured Bahr.

KIRWAN snorted. "I'm not fat, except in comparison with a tottering structure of strings and wires like you: merely well-padded. Now, we want to get out of here before the Dasht of Darya comes down on us horse, foot and artillery. But we can't just write a letter to Novorecife to come fetch us. In

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the first place it'd bring Gorchakov down on our necks; in the second, Kuroki censors all the mail to keep contacts with the decadent Terran civilization down to a minimum."

"What then?" queried Althea.

"I thought maybe we could do something with Halevi—you know, the one they call Diomedes." Kirwan pointed to where the patriarchal Israeli was disporting himself like a porpoise.

Bahr shook his head. "I have talked with Mr. Halevi too, and I fear that he is as much of a fanatic in his way as Mr. Kuroki. He talks a great speech about democracy, and leads some sort of underground opposition. But once in power—"

"Mother of God, have they even got politics here?"

"Man is a political animal," said Bahr.

"Then I might as well go back to Earth; this turns out to be just as crass. What's your idea?"

Bahr explained: "First, I want to get in touch with the Záva. After all they are what I came here for."

"Here, now don't go joining them! Kuroki's right about that. If we do get caught here our only safety lies in absolute neutrality."

Althea burst out: "I don't agree, Brian! If the Daryava are going to make an unprovoked attack on Zá to enslave its people, it's our duty to warn them."

"Look, darling, if you want to risk your pretty neck for the sake of the monkey-men that's one thing, but ours too is something else. Gottfried, she's a fine girl with noble instincts and all, but as a man of science you should take an impartial attitude, now shouldn't you?"

Bahr frowned.

"I fear that I agree with Althea, though not for her reason."

"What then?"

"I came here to do an important job, but if my subjects are all killed or enslaved I cannot test them, can I?"

"The Devil take your tests! Don't tell me that learning whether a monkey can put a dot in the circle and in the triangle but not in the hexagon is worth more than life itself—even life on the Isle of the Free!"

"There is more to it than that," continued Bahr equably. "You said yourself that Mr. Kuroki will not help us to leave here, and our first chance otherwise would not come until the visit of the next ship bringing mail from Majbur."

"When's that?" asked Althea.

"Not for several ten-nights, as I ascertained by inquiry. But if we warned the Záva, we might be in a position to ask that they take us off this island in one of their ships."

Kirwan said, "But how are you going to get in touch with them?"

"Through the so-called Virgin of Zesh."

" 'Tis against the rules of the club to visit the lady," said Kirwan.

"That seems unreasonable," said Althea.

"You don't know our latter-day Zeus," said Kirwan. "The more unreasonable a thing is the better he likes it. He claims the Záva are following in the fatal footsteps of us Terrans, by building up an industrialized mechanized culture. So they're as contaminating an influence as Earthmen and he tried to stop all contact with them."

"Well, he can't stop Gottfried and me from going there," said Althea. "We don't belong."

"Maybe he can't, but some of his muscle-boys could have a lot of fun trying."

"Oh." Althea had not until this moment realized the full implications of being in a land where the only law was the whim of the head man. But she scornfully asked:

"Are you afraid?"

"Devil a bit. If you and Gottfried go, I go too. But if you'll take a bit of advice, you'll go at night when the rest of the nature-nuts are asleep."

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ALTHEA and Bahr managed to avoid the officious heads of the colony after dinner and spent the afternoon in professional work, consisting of Bahr's teaching Althea about psychology in general and psychometry in particular. Although Althea had had a fairly good education, it had been almost entirely in the arts and had barely skimmed the sciences, so that now she found amazing new vistas opening out before her with each lecture from Bahr.

She began to understand her own repressions, to the point where she could believe that she might have married Gorchakov willingly, as he claimed, under the control of a wanton and passionate but normally suppressed part of her nature.

She even, looking at Bahr's sleek dark head, wondered if she had been right in turning him down. But no, able teacher and conscientious scientist though he might be, he had no more emotional appeal than any piece of shiny and efficient machinery. No doubt there was a human spirit struggling to express itself behind the façade, as Bahr himself had indicated, but that did her no good. Furthermore, she could not forget how unwilling he had been to bring her to Zesh until Kirwan had bullied him into it.

Kirwan returned to the hut to wash for supper, with clenched fists and grinding teeth.

"The fiends!" he howled. "The foul Firbolgs! I'll tear 'em to bits and dance on the gory remains!"

"What now?" said Bahr.

"They're putting on something called a folk-drama; some rite of the equinox or some such nonsense, and wanted me to work on it. Well, says I, the great Brian Kirwan turns out as fine a piece of verse as any lad in Ireland, so if they'd like some lyrics— but no; a fellow they call Euripides has already written the play. Well then, did they want me to act? Devil a bit. What d'ye think they did want?"

"What?" said Althea and Bahr.

"A stage-hand! An assistant scene-shifter, to crawl around tacking up pieces of burlap to symbolize the decadent Social Capitalism of Earth! The black shame of it! And if I was good, they said, maybe they'd let me carry a torch in the final procession that symbolizes the triumph of natural Rousellian man over the evils of civilization. Imagine that!"

THE Temple of Zesh stood in a rocky part of the island, two or three hoda from Elysion. Althea Merrick, Gottfried Bahr and Brian Kirwan felt their way along the trail leading to this structure, helped by the fact that for a short period all three moons were in the sky at once, making open areas light enough to read in.

Then, suddenly, they were in front of the temple. To Althea it looked like an oversized salt-cellar with a light in the top. They approached it warily. Kirwan said, "D'you see anything that looks like a bell-button, now?"

They looked around the door, but no knocker or other means of announcing their arrival appeared.

"Well," said Kirwan, the sweat on his forehead glistening in the moonlight, "we can't stand here all night."

He smote the door with his knuckles. Nothing happened. Althea looked at the structure more closely. From the recent advancement of the Záva she had the impression that the structure must be of late origin, but the weathered look of the stones belied this. She whispered a question to Bahr.

"It is not known," said Bahr. "Possibly the tower was built back in the time of the Kalwm Empire, and later the tailless Krishnans who built it abandoned the island of Zesh for one reason or another. My archeological colleagues have not settled the question yet, though by the Pugachevski method of radioactive measurement of stone it should be possible the date of construction to fix—"

The door opened silently, framing a

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cloaked black figure. Bahr fell silent and Kirwan recoiled with a violent start. The figure and the Terrans regarded one another silently until Althea began to fidget.

"The door of the righteous," said the figure at last in Portuguese, "is ever open to the legitimate visitor. Don't let all the flying things of the night in."

They entered the door, which swung silently shut behind them, and followed the figure. The apparition led them through a short hall, lit by one feeble oil-lamp, into a big central chamber with a dais in the middle mounted upon a curious tripod. The figure heaved itself up on top of the tripod and settled itself into a cross-legged position that, to Althea's imaginative mind, had something of the simian about it.

The chamber was in the form of an octagon lit by several lamps. The walls bore ancient bas-reliefs. Though blurred by time, the reliefs seemed to illustrate the amatory adventures of some godlet with disconcerting candor.

Althea, feeling herself blush a trifle, observed that Bahr had lost himself in impersonal contemplation of these decorations, while Kirwan seemed to be goggling in a state of wordless terror.

Althea, though her own heart was pounding, pulled herself together. "Are you the Virgin of Zesh?"

"The name of a thing is that which speakers commonly apply to the thing, whether or not it be well applied."

A little taken aback by this oracular reply, Althea decided that it meant "yes." She said:

"We are three new arrivals at Elysion—one member of the cult and two non-members, and we have news of interest to the Záva."

"News is judged by its verity, novelty and portentousness, not by its origin."

Althea told, in her stumbling Portuguese, of her experience with the lecherous sailor on Memzadá's ship. When she had finished the cloaked figure said:

"News, like fruit, spoils if delayed too long in transit." The Virgin started to lower herself off the tripod.

Bahr said, "Excuse me, senhora, but would you please also inform your Chief Yuruzh that I, Doctor Gottfried Bahr, of the University of Jena, should like an interview with him?"

"No time," said the Virgin. "Out of my way, Terrans!"

SHE scuttled through one of the arches and disappeared. Althea heard the diminishing sound of footsteps going up. She and her companions waited around for some time, but nothing more happened.

"Br-r-r, let's be getting out of here," said Kirwan. "The place gives me the shuddering creeps."

"Atavistic fears," said Bahr. "However, as we do not seem to be accomplishing anything further, I am not averse with your suggestion to comply."

They trailed out. Althea looked back at the octagonal tower in the moonlight, from an upper window of which a light was winking. Then she plunged into the forest on the trail of her companions.

She had been plodding at the tail of the procession, seeing only Kirwan's broad back as little splashes of moonlight ran over it, for some time before she realized that Bahr was out of sight and hearing. She spoke, "Brian, you'd better hurry—"

"And would you be afraid of being lost, now?" he said, turning. "To be sure, nobody's ever lost with Brian Kirwan. And you don't suppose, *cuisle mo croidhe*, that 'twas out of sheer weariness of spirit that I lagged?"

"Why, I never thought—"

Kirwan snatched Althea's right hand in his. "Listen, darling, for days I've been tongue-tied with love of you, and me eloquent and all. Even though the natural man turns out to be a fake and a disappointment, there's enough romance left in the galaxy for a well-matched pair of hearts like ours. Let me show you—"

"Brian! Let go!" said Althea, her voice rising in alarm. She twisted her

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arm, but Kirwan's grip was too strong to break.

"But me no buts, darling, for as sure as Ireland's a damp little country you belong to me body and soul. Why, if we could some day poison that worthless husband of yours, I might even let you marry me legal and all! Why should we let—"

Althea struggled to escape as the poet slid an arm around her waist. Squeezing her to him he pinned her free arm between his body and hers and began to press kisses on her face while she squirmed and dodged, meanwhile pouring out a stream of broken phrases: ". . . . my little Sassenach rose . . . with three moons we'll love thrice as ardently . . . stop squirmin' darling, and let me find a soft spot . . . isn't one virgin on Zesh enough?"

"Brian, please!" she cried. Stop! *Help!*"

His hot breath fanned her face as he panted like a bull; the bristles of his burgeoning beard scratched her skin. When no help came and Kirwan began to bend her backwards down to the moss-grass, Althea kicked him in the shins. He grunted and flinched. Getting an arm free, Althea raked his face with her nails, bit his wrist, and butted him in the nose.

"Ye devil!" he panted, and then she got loose enough to bring a knee up into his crotch.

In an instant she had torn loose and was running like a deer, with Kirwan blundering after. This was one accomplishment in which she had a great advantage over him, for, besides his burden of fat, his legs were short and his vision not of the best, though vanity forbade him to wear glasses.

Althea tripped over a root and sprawled, but was up again in an instant, while behind her Kirwan fell even more heavily over another obstacle. After a few minutes of dodging she stopped to get her breath and to listen for sounds of pursuit. From far away came a muffled call.

"Althea darling! Where the devil are you? Sure, come back; I'll not be hurting you! You'll be lost in the woods!"

Althea surmised that they were both lost by now, but she had no intention of trusting herself to Kirwan again. She walked, she did not know in what direction, until she could no longer hear Kirwan's calls. Then she found a thicket, pulled together a bed of sorts, and curled herself up in an effort to sleep.

VIII

WHEN it was light enough to see, Althea shook herself awake and climbed a tree. From her perch she could see the top of the Temple of Zesh to the north, and in the opposite direction the clearings and hut-roofs of Elysion. She knew that the path from one to the other ran close to the cliffs along the east side of Zesh, occasionally coming out to the very edge. So if she simply walked east, watching carefully, she should soon pick up this trail and then follow it south to the village.

She arrived back at her cabin to find Bahr leaping to his feet to seize her. She let herself be hugged—she could do with a bit of comforting at this point—but discouraged the scientist when he wished to proceed to more intimate attentions.

Bahr said, "Althea, tell me what happened? Brian came limping in a couple of hours ago with a wild story of having met a tailed Krishnan savage in the forest and fought him in the dark while you ran away and disappeared. I doubted the story, having a psychological analysis of the man made, and concluded that it was more likely a fantasy composed to account for the scratches on his face, which he had received at your hands."

Althea told Bahr what had happened. The psychologist commented, "That is typical of the behavior of these emotionally infantile types. They will lie to avert an immediate unpleasantness even though they know that the truth will

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shortly transpire."

"What are you going to do about it?" she asked.

"What should I do? I doubt if Brian is willing to be psychoanalyzed, even if I had the time to do so."

"That's not what I meant!" said Althea in exasperation.

"What did you mean, dear?"

"I thought maybe you'd like to knock his block off."

"Really? But my dear Althea, that is a most impractical suggestion. In the first place he is stronger than I, and no doubt more proficient in the using of his fists. Therefore, the probability is that I should be the one to have the block knocked off, as you so picturesquely put it."

"You defied Halevi on the playing-field," she said in a last effort to arouse Bahr's masculine belligerence.

"That has nothing to do with the case, and my analysis of the psychological factors told me that there was little chance of Halevi's forcing the issue. There is no doubt on the other hand that Kirwan, if attacked, would fight vigorously. In the second place, even were I victorious, such treatment would do nothing to abate the urges and the neuroses that cause Brian in this irrational manner to behave. I think that you are being a little emotionally infantile yourself."

Althea sighed. No doubt a wish to see Bahr wipe up the alleys of Elysion with the battered remains of Brian Kirwan did indicate some emotional immaturity. But if Bahr had done so, she thought that she might even have managed to fall in love with him. As it was he was hung more securely than ever on his pedagogic peg.

She turned her head at the sound of voices and footsteps outside, then looked out. However, it was not another disturbance involving Kirwan. Diogo Kuroki was standing in the square talking with the lookout. The latter said, loudly enough for Althea to hear:

". . . only one galley, but it's their biggest, and I think I saw Yuruzh himself in the bow."

"Round up the rest of the Council," said Kuroki. "We shall go down at once to see what they wish."

Bahr, looking over Althea's shoulder, said: "Let us go too, yes?"

Althea and Bahr started for the beach. The news spread with transcendental swiftness, for the path became magically crowded with other villagers headed in the same direction. They arrived just ahead of Kuroki and several of the older members of the colony with wreaths on their heads and their cloaks pinned about them in artistically Hellenic folds. Most of these had also come to the beach with Kuroki to greet Kirwan on his arrival.

The Council scrambled breathlessly down the last few meters of the steep path, but as soon as they reached the sand they lined up and advanced towards the water with majestically measured strides, wielding their staves as they went.

OUT in the emerald sea lay a war-galley, her toothed ram at water-level pointing shoreward. The oars on each side lifted and fell in unison as the ship felt her way towards the beach. Then a command was cried aboard the ship. The oars dug in and the water foamed, and in she came with a rush, to stop with a sigh of sand at the water's edge.

A swarm of dark beings spilled down over the bow on to the sand. Althea had seen tailed Krishnans before, as on the Majbur-Qadr ferry: a little shorter than human beings, hairy, and rather less human of visage than the tailless Krishnans. By human standards they would be deemed egregiously ugly. Now a score of them, naked but for helmets, sword-belts and small shields slung over their backs, leaped down on to the sand and lined up on either side of the ship's bow.

Then came another tailed Krishnan, different from the rest, and evidently a

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thing of distinction. He wore a great black cloak with a scarlet lining and a kind of soft-leather legging on his shins. A band of gold cloth encircled his head. His tail was shorter than those of the others, his pelt was less, and his features were more human. In fact, had his head sat on human shoulders, Althea would have described him as "attractively ugly," with hawk-nosed, wide-cheekboned features reminiscent of those of a Sioux or Blackfoot Indian. He moved with superabundant vitality, and Althea found him strangely attractive in a satyr-like, non-human way.

"Good-morning, senhores," said the newcomer in perfect Portuguese. "We are on our way to consult the Virgin."

"Good morning, *chefee*," said Kuroki. "Is that all? You don't wish to see us about anything else?"

"Não. But thank you for your courtesy in welcoming us."

With a shake of his cloak Yuruzh strode across the beach, followed by his minions, and disappeared up the trail.

Kuroki called out, "Back to the village, my children. We have work to do. No fooling around the beach just because our landlord has paid us a visit."

The Roussellians started up the trail too, leaving the galley stranded with her hairy crew climbing down into the water and splashing about. Althea and Bahr trailed after. Kirwan had not put in an appearance.

Althea was just finishing breakfast in the Hall when a Roussellian came up and touched her arm. "Excuse me, but are you Senhorita Althea Merrick?"

"Sim."

"Will you step outside, please?"

Althea stood up. Bahr hastily wiped his mouth to follow her. Outside the Hall she found Yuruzh and his guards facing Kuroki and several other Roussellians, including Halevi-Diomedes. As soon as Althea appeared, Diogo Kuroki swung on her.

"You!" he barked. "You were told to have no contact with the Záva!"

"What's this?" said Althea.

Yuruzh said in English: "You're English speaking, aren't you, Miss Merrick?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Our Noble Savage claims you're a member of his society. Are you?"

"Let me explain," said Bahr. "I am psychologist from Terra, come here to make some psychometric tests, and this young lady is my assistant. We came with another Terran who really is a member of the cult. Now if you could set a time for some preliminary tests, of yourself and a representative sample of your subjects, the Interplanetary Council would be most—"

"Sorry, old man, but that'll have to wait," said Yuruzh. He then addressed Kuroki, "If she's not she had every right to warn me. Even if she had been, I should consider a deliberate refusal to tell us of the approach of our enemies as an unfriendly act. You seem to forget that this island belongs to us, and you're merely tenants. Now get along about your business, and consider yourselves lucky that I do not hang a few of you on general principles."

Fuming but cowed, the leading Roussellians departed. Yuruzh spoke in his own language to one of the tailed ones, who ran towards the beach. Then he spoke to Althea, "And now, my dear Miss Merrick, where can we discuss this threat in comfort?"

Althea led the tailed Krishnan to her hut, Bahr trailing after. Inside she told him once again the story of the sailor on the *Labághti* and produced the crumpled note.

YURUZH scrutinized the paper, and said, "I hope my people will be able to write their own language better than this fellow does his. This calls for thought."

For some minutes Yuruzh sat with his chin on his fist like Rodin's Thinker. Then his meditations were interrupted by a long-tailed Zau who dashed into the hut and spilled out a whole para-

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graph in his own speech.

"*Merde!*" said Yuruzh. "The dasht moved swiftly. One of our gliders has sighted his whole fleet headed for the south coast of Zesh."

"You mean for *us*?" said Althea.

"Precisely, my dear. He seems to have made a detour so as to take this island by surprise."

"Why should he attack Zesh instead of Zá? I thought he was after your people."

"Perhaps he knows Zá will prove a tough nut, and prefers to seize Zesh as an advanced base first. Or maybe he thinks he can thus force our smaller fleet out for a pitched battle, where he'd have the advantage. However, I have work to do, my friends. Thanks for your coöperation."

Yuruzh squeezed Althea's hand, waved to Bahr, and walked out.

"Quite a personality," said Bahr, staring after the Zao chief. "I suspect that he is one of the few Krishnans who have been to Earth. He could not so easily the Terran mannerisms have acquired otherwise. He is also devilishly intelligent."

"What'll we do?" said Althea. "We never got a chance to ask to be evacuated from Zesh."

Bahr shrugged. "I don't know. We might go out and see if we can see the attacking fleet."

They wandered out towards the cliff-top. Halevi-Diomedes shouted at them: "Why aren't you two at work?" but without real conviction; most of the Roussellians had taken a spontaneous day off, despite the commands of their leaders, because of the excitement and uncertainty.

Roqir blazed down upon a tranquil Sadabao Sea. Far out, just breaking the horizon, Althea saw a row of little specks.

"Those would be the ships," said Bahr, peering through his glasses. "Unfortunately I am too myopic to discern them at this distance."

They watched the approaching fleet for a time; then Althea said, "Let's see if that galley is still on our beach."

She began to stroll westward along the cliff-top towards the beach. She had not however gone many steps when voices caused her to turn. There stood a score of Roussellians, both men and women, stripped for action. Some held clubs; some stones. Diogo Kuroki was haranguing them:

"There they are! The decadent products of a rotten civilization who have tried to destroy our noble experiment! I warned them not to take sides in this squabble among the natives, but they did so anyway, because of their jealousy of the simple bliss of our utopian life and their implacable hatred of whatever is natural and beautiful. So now we are involved in this battle and may be destroyed. Is it just to let them go scot-free?"

Não!" shouted the Roussellians, and arms bearing stones swung up to throw.

"Run!" cried Althea, doing so.

Bahr ran after her. Stones whizzed. As Bahr came abreast of Althea, one struck him in the back with a horrid thump. Another grazed Althea's left hip, not hard enough to do serious damage. Behind her she could hear the yelps and tramplings and pants of the pack.

"The beach path!" panted Bahr.

Althea found the trail and bounded down it in great leaps, her eyes glued to the ground ahead. She had a horror of turning an ankle, falling headlong and being beaten to jelly by the enraged Roussellians before she could recover.

THE beach seemed much farther than she had thought, and she feared that she had gone astray. Behind her the utopians pounded grimly on. She would have thought that, in view of her speed, she would have left them behind by now, but the children of nature were able track-men.

Bahr's breath came in gasps behind

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her. If she was not in training for such athletics, the psychologist was an even worse case. Althea guessed that he had probably taken no more serious exercise than hoisting a stein in decades.

Behind came Kuroki's scream: "Faster! Catch them before they reach the beach!"

With a final burst of speed Althea ran out of the forest on to the beach. Yuruzh's galley was still beached in the middle of the crescent-shaped strand, and another galley lay beside it. Tailed Záva were all over the beach. Althea picked out Yuruzh by his stature and his cloak and diadem near the bow of the first ship, talking with others of his kind.

"Help! Yuruzh!" she cried, running towards him.

The chief looked around. The next instant he had snatched a bow from another Zau. He drew, aimed, and released all in one motion. The arrow whizzed past Althea, who had an instant of horrified wonder if he was shooting at her.

The arrow struck something behind her with a meaty sound, and there was the soft thump of a body's falling on the sand. Althea halted and looked back.

A big Roussellian lay a few feet behind her with the point of an arrow protruding from his back. The shaft had struck him in the chest, and he had fallen forward on it, pushing it the rest of the way through his body against the sand. Althea did not know him except in the vague sense of having seen him around Elysion. His club lay beside him.

The other Roussellians, including Kuroki, were scattering and dodging back into the shelter of the trees. In a twinkling they had all disappeared. Gottfried Bahr collapsed on the sand, not because he was hurt, but from exhaustion. He lay drinking in great gasps of air while Yuruzh, a second arrow nocked, walked towards Althea and said, "My word, young lady, you seem to lead a full life! What is it this time?"

When she got her breath, Althea told Yuruzh what had happened. He pondered and said, "I fear we shall have to terminate this Arcadian dream; your fellow-Terrans are simply too difficult to put up with. But—"

"Yes?" said Althea.

Yuruzh had turned his attention seaward. The Daryao ships were nearer, but because she was now down closer to the sea-level than she had been on the cliff Althea could not see any more of them; just the sails.

Yuruzh said, "I was just going to send for you. We have one small chance of beating those fellows, but it depends upon a ruse. For the purpose I need one non-Zau who is also a powerful swimmer. I fear our Roussellian friends won't help us, but perhaps one of you two could. How about you, Dr. Bahr?"

BAHR had gotten his breath back but shook his head. "I am no athlete of any kind, Herr Chief. I can perhaps a dozen meters swim, but that is all."

"How about you, Miss Merrick?"

"I'm a pretty good swimmer, though out of practice."

"Can you swim a *hod*?"

"How far is that?"

"About one and one-fifth kilometers, or three-quarters of the old English mile."

"Y-yes, I think I can."

"Very well, I should like you to wait until those ships are closer and then swim out to them. They'll probably heave to about a hod out, because the rocks and shoals extend almost that far out and they'll halt for final orders and formation. Call to them when you get near them and they'll haul you aboard. Then when they ask you what you're doing there, tell them I'm on Zesh with a few Záva consulting the Virgin, and that you escaped from durance vile." Yuruzh grinned. "You'd better lay it on thick; tell 'em I've been subjecting you to my bestial lusts."

"But why?" inquired Althea.

"Because the dasht will then come

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rushing in to grab me before I can get back to my own island."

"But you don't want that, do you?"

"Yes I do. I'm laying a trap for him with myself as the cheese. You carry out your part, and then hold yourself ready to dive overboard the minute anything goes wrong with the ship and swim ashore."

"Well—" said Althea doubtfully. The plan frightened her, and she had little confidence in her own ability to carry through such a coup.

"I know it's a lot to ask, but what else can I do? The dasht has me outnumbered two to one, and I'm not fooling myself that the Daryava aren't keen fighters. After all I have a kind of utopian experiment of my own to protect."

"I don't know. I'm not really up to such a feat."

"Please!" Yuruzh squeezed her hand in his and looked down at her out of big green eyes. "After all I did save your life just now. You owe me something."

"All right," said Althea. "What language shall I use to the dasht? I don't know all these dialects."

"Ordinary Gozashtandou will do; can you speak it?"

"Well enough." Althea gave Yuruzh the speech that she intended to make to the Dasht of Darya.

"Fine," said Yuruzh. "Don't try to be too glib; if you fumble around a bit it'll carry more conviction." He gazed out to sea, shading his eyes with his hand. "You'd better push off in a couple of minutes."

Althea exchanged glances with Bahr. The psychologist looked a little ashamed and furtive, nervously pulling his lower lip. Then there was the question of what to wear. . . .

Althea sighed. So much had happened to her that the sternly puritanical tenets of Ecumenical Monotheism seemed to have lost their meaning. She took off her clothes, piled them beside Bahr on the sand, and said a brief good-bye:

"Auf Wiedersehen Liebchen," said Bahr. "For once in my life I am ashamed of myself because I cannot do this instead of you. Not a mature attitude, but I can't help it."

"Good luck, old thing," said Yuruzh. "Don't forget my instructions."

Althea waded into the water. The surf was light; a wave slapped her amidships, and then she stretched herself out and swam. The water was pleasant—not quite soupily warm, but not cool enough to sap the strength. Althea hoped that no gvám or other sea-monster lurked in the vicinity. Knowing the distance that she had to cover she took her time and varied her stroke. As she rose to the tops of the low swells she glimpsed the fleet of Darya ahead.

Behind, the beach and the two Zao galleys receded. Ahead, with much greater rapidity, the hostile fleet approached.

IX

"WELL?" said the Dasht of Darya. The lord of the isle of Darya, of the two mammillary peaks known throughout the lands of the Triple Seas, stood in his gold-chased armor on the stern of the big flush-decked quadrireme that was his flagship. Althea, dripping on the planks, stood before him, her hair plastered to her head. On each side of her a grease-clad Daryau gripped one of her arms in both his hands.

Althea, with much fumbling for the right word, told her tale.

"Ohé!" said the dasht with a sweeping gesture. "'Tis indeed a tale fraught with ponderable interest, be it true or false. But that, my Terran drabby, we'll ascertain in pudding time. *Ao,* Mirán! Bind this exotic being to yon mizzen-mast—not so tightly as to harm her alien flesh, yet not so loosely as to afford a chance for the mammet's escape. Then stand ye with bared brand nigh unto her, and if it transpire that she into disaster's maw doth lead us, smite off her mazzard!"

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The dasht raised his voice to a shout, "Now signal to my captains brave to form line abreast of all ships of bireme or higher rate and pull for the Zeshian shore as Qarár's crew pulled for Fossanderan when they fled from the Witch of the Va'andao Sea! Eftsoons, rascallions! Jump it yarely, lest the proudest prize slip from our laggard digits!"

The voice of the dasht had risen to a scream. With the last phrase he swept out his jewel-hilted sword, whirled it around his head, stamped his boots on the deck, and pointed shoreward with the blade. Althea thought that the only thing he omitted to emphasize his meaning was to dive overboard and start swimming for shore. But then he couldn't in that armor.

The Daryava holding Althea now tied her to the mast. Then one of them drew his sword and stood by, his grease glistening in the sun, which shone down hotly on the bare deck now that the sails had been furled for action. The fellow kept running his eyes up and down Althea's body and feeling his edge with his thumb.

The fleet shook itself out into formation, the larger ships all in a row in front, the smaller ones trailing. Signal-pennons flapped at mastheads. The bong of coxswain's gongs came over the water to mingle with that of the flagship's own as the rowers (four to an oar on the flagship) dug in their blades.

Althea, facing forward, watched the shore creep nearer with agonizing slowness. The dasht and his gilded officers had gone forward to cluster on the bow while common sailors prepared rope ladders ready to unroll the instant the ships touched. Others piled weapons for use by the rowers when the latter's present task had ended.

The sterns of the two Zao ships became plainer. The beach, which had swarmed with life when Althea had started out, seemed empty. She looked uneasily at the Daryau beside her. This was a complication that Yuruzh, for all his alleged brilliance, had not thought of—or had he? He was, as Bahr had said, a devilishly intelligent fellow.

Thump, swish, thump, swish went the oars. The shore, that had seemed to approach so slowly, was now fast opening out. . . .

Crash!

The flagship shuddered, lurched and healed. The cluster of notabilities in the bow fell sprawling, at least one going over the side. Oarsmen half fell from their benches; others were knocked off by the looms of oars.

IN AN instant the flagship was a screaming chaos. Krishnans crawled over one another, scrambled to their feet, and bawled orders. Through the bedlam of yells Althea heard a grinding, crunching, tearing, and crackling of riven timbers and a gurgle and swish of inrushing water. She thought for a flash that Yuruzh must somehow have lured the ship on to a submerged rock. All forward motion had ceased.

The second after the ship had struck, Mirán had given a loud cry and swung his sword at Althea's slender neck. But then the lurch of the ship had sent him too staggering. The blade whistled harmlessly through the air, and Mirán disappeared in the general confusion.

At the same time a quick succession of crashes and outcries from the other ships told that they too had encountered disaster.

Then the volume of cries redoubled until it beat deafeningly on Althea's ears. Up the oars and over the sides of the flagship swarmed Yuruzh's tailed men with weapons in their hands. They had a strangely masked appearance, and it took Althea an instant to realize that they were wearing a kind of respirator or diving-mask, attached to a small air-bag strapped to their backs. They swarmed down among the Daryava and steel clanged and clashed.

Then as the flagship sank lower, the Dasht of Darya appeared, pushing and fighting his way aft, clutching at rails, masts and other objects with his free

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hand to steady himself on the slanting deck.

When he sighted Althea, the ruler of Darya shifted his grip on his sword, screamed an unintelligible sentence, and stamped towards her. With teeth bared and foam drooling from his lips the dasht caught her hair with his free hand, pulled her head back, and swung the sword at her throat.

Plunk!

A hoarse gargling screech came from the dasht. Althea, who had closed her eyes in expectation of the fatal stroke, opened them again. An arrow had passed through the Krishnan's face, in through the angle between neck and jaw and out through the cheek on the opposite side. The dasht dropped his sword and reeled to the rail, clutching the shaft and trying to scream orders from his mangled mouth.

Althea glanced forward to see Yuruzh, bow in hand, run aft towards her. First the Zao chief struck the dasht across the face with the bow-stave, knocking him to the deck, his face a mask of brownish blood through which breath and fragments of teeth bubbled. The Yuruzh drew his own sword and cut Althea's bonds.

"Over the side and swim ashore!" he shouted, then ran forward again towards the mainmast.

A Daryan tried to stop him. Yuruzh leaped into the air and struck, and the Krishnan's head flew off and rolled down the deck while the spouting body collapsed. Racing on, Yuruzh cut the halyards that held the personal flag of the dasht to the head of the mainmast and gave a mighty tug to one free end. The rope ran through the block; the flag fluttered out and down, finally falling over the side.

A new din from seaward caused Althea to look around. There was the fleet of Zá, swarming out from its own island, bearing down upon the smaller Daryao ships that had followed the main attack and which, by furious backing on their oars, had all managed to avoid running into the larger ships when the latter had struck.

The fight on the flagship subsided. Some Daryava had surrendered, kneeling with outstretched arms. Others were leaping over the side as the tailed men chased them about the deck with bloody blades. Yuruzh, spattered with russet-brown Krishnan blood, ran back to where Althea still stood.

"Thought I said to jump over?" he panted. "But it doesn't matter now the ship's ours. Wait here; I still have the rest to take."

"Let me do something!" said Althea.

"Fine." Yuruzh snatched a battle-ax from the deck and pressed it into Althea's hand. "Help guard these prisoners. The minute one makes a suspicious move, split his skull."

Then yelling in his own tongue to the other tailed men he rallied them to the rail, all but the few told off to bind and guard prisoners. At his signal they all dove over in a wave and struck out for the next ship, swimming like otters. Meanwhile a ship from Zá, abandoning its chase of the fleeing smaller ships of Darya, turned and drove its beak into the stern of another stranded Daryao galley with rending crash. . . .

FEELING emotionally drained, Althea lounged on the beach and watched Yuruzh tidy up the remains of the battle. Prisoners were paraded, wounded bandaged, and corpses piled for burning. The Dasht of Darya, unrecognizable through the bandages that covered his mangled face, was hauled roughly forward. He sank to his knees and mumbled. Yuruzh spoke a quick sentence and the Krishnan was hauled away.

Meanwhile other Záva were at work on the shattered ships of the navy of Darya, which lay half submerged on the shallow bottom, waves washing over their decks. The caudate Krishnans were prying loose everything salvageable. The sound of hammers and axes filled the hot noon air. Yuruzh came over to where Althea lay and flopped

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down upon the sand.

"Thank God that's all for the present!" he said. "Who's this?"

Gottfried Bahr introduced Brian Kirwan, sitting subdued in his burlap cloak and avoiding Althea's eyes.

"'Twas a fine fight, sir," said Kirwan. "The Irish never did better, even at Clontarf."

"We were lucky," said Yuruzh. "Only twenty-odd killed and twice that number wounded, and they lost several times that. They tried to fight my boys in the water, forgetting we swim by instinct and they don't."

Althea asked: "What happened? All I know is the ships suddenly ran on some sort of obstacles."

"Sharpened tree-trunks with boulders roped to them to make them sink," explained Yuruzh. "I had a lot of the things ready for such an occasion, and the boys planted them in the sand of the bottom while you were swimming out to the fleet."

"Did you know the dasht might use me as a kind of hostage?"

"I recognized the possibility, but I had to take that chance. I'm sorry." The chief wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. "Jeepers, I could use a drink!"

Kirwan said: "I had some fine whiskey, but the Noble Savages confiscated it."

"I see a cure for that," said Yuruzh.

Althea asked, "What are you going to do with the dasht? Kill him?"

"It would be a pleasure, but that would be like trumping my partner's ace. While he's alive in my hands the Daryava may think twice about attacking us. Never destroy an asset—hullo, what's this?"

A PROCESSION debouched from the trees. Two Roussellians hustled Diogo Kuroki along, naked with his wrists bound behind him. After them came Aaron Halevi and several others, wrapped in their himations and their dignity.

Halevi planted himself before the chief of the Záva and said: "Senhor chief, we understand that you are displeased with us."

"Your discernment is acute, Senhor Diomedes," said Yuruzh in Portuguese.

"However," said Halevi, "we don't think that you will continue to feel that way. We have just had a revolution."

"Sim?"

"Pois sim. We have dethroned the tyrant whose blind fanaticism caused all the trouble. Here he is; do what you like with him. Our new regime will be strictly democratic, affording to all that perfect personal liberty which is the birthright of natural man. Everybody may think and say what he pleases, provided of course that he agrees with me. And our first change of policy, besides liberalizing the rules to allow the eating of meat, will be to seek closer relations with the Záva, to afford you too the opportunity of benefiting from our superior ideals and institutions."

"Obrigado, senhor,' said Yuruzh, adding dryly, "Whether the Záva can stand such enlightenment in their present stage of culture is something that must be carefully considered. Meanwhile, in lieu of a fine, I will accept your medicinal whisky supply. All of it!"

"Sim, senhor," said Halevi and hurried off, leaving Kuroki.

"What are you going to do with *him?"* said Kirwan, indicating Kuroki.

"Send him back to Novorecife, I suppose," said Yuruzh. "It would do no good to kill him, and I certainly don't want him on Zá. Ordinary Terrans are difficult enough, but Qondyor save me from a Terran utopian idealist who really believes his own line."

"It is a not uncommon neurosis," said Bahr. "There is in every psyche a split between the part that tries to cope with the real world and the part that flees into a better world of its own imaginings. Normally the latter tendency acts merely as a useful safety-valve. It is only when it comes the mind to dominate that touch with reality is lost."

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Yuruzh said, "I know. La Fontaine expressed it somewhat more poetically:

Quel esprit ne bat la campagne?
Qui ne fait châteaux en Espagne?
Picrochole, Pyrrhus, la laitière,
enfin tous,
Autant les sages que les fous.
Chacun songe en veillant;
il n'est rien de plus doux.
Une flatteuse erreur emporte
alors nos âmes;
Tout le bien du monde est à nous,
Tous les honneurs,
toutes les femmes.
Quand je suis seul,
je fais au plus brave un défi,
Je m'écarte,
je vais détrôner le sophi;
On m'élit roi, mon peuple m'aime,
Les diadèmes vont
sur ma tête pleuvant:
Quelque accident fait-il que
je rentre en moi-même,
Je suis gros Jean comme
devant.*"

"Do you know everything?" said Althea. The la Fontaine verse got under her skin because she recognized an excess of the day-dreaming tendency in herself. However, she did not think that by trying she could change her personality to that of an Amazonian leader or a lush lewd strumpet, even had she wished to do so.

Yuruzh smiled. "Not quite. I did pick up a thing or two the years I was at the Institute at Princeton."

Bahr asked, "Excuse me, but are you of the same species as the other Záva?"

"Not exactly. I'm a hybrid between the tailed and tailless species." Yuruzh glanced around. "What's keeping that whiskey? Pychets!" He spoke to one of the tailed Krishnans, who ran into the forest where the trail joined the beach.

"Now about those tests," began Bahr, but a rise in the voices of the Záva drew attention seaward.

Yuruzh jumped up to see better. A merchant lateener was standing off Zesh beyond the line of wreckage, and a dinghy was rowing rapidly shoreward. Althea had hardly observed it before it grounded and its people scrambled out. Two of them walked purposefully across the sand towards Althea.

One was a small dark-brown man in the travelling-habit of a bishop of the Ecumenical Monotheistic Church. The other was Afanasi Vasilyitch Gorchakov.

X

ALTHEA gave a little shriek of horrified surprise. She half turned to run when Gorchakov's roar brought her attention back again. He had a pistol in his hand.

Yuruzh had half drawn his sword, but at the sight of the gun he slowly sheathed it again. Gorchakov swung the muzzle so that it pointed in turn at everybody near him.

"You know what this is, don't you?" he said. "Well, everybody be good, or you know what happens. Althea, you come with me."

"I won't."

"Then you get shot." Gorchakov raised the pistol.

Althea glanced around frantically. Bahr had disappeared; Yuruzh and Kirwan were standing helplessly.

She appealed to the clerical man, "Are you Bishop Harichand Raman?"

The small man spoke Hindi-accented English: "Yes, my child. I was making a sarcuit of the Sadabao ports, and hearing from Mr. Gorchakov that you were on Zesh I came ashore with him to see."

"But can't you stop him or something? I hate and loathe him?"

"I am sorry, my dear, but there is

*What spirit fights not a campaign?
Who doesn't build castles in Spain?
Picrochole, Pyrrhus, the milkmaid, the whole lot,
The sages as much as the sot.
Everyone daydreams; nought this pleasure surpasses.
Our souls on a tide of illusion are whirled;
We possess all the wealth of the world,
All the fame, all the lasses.
When I'm alone, the bravest I'll face,
I ramble; the Shah of Iran I'll erase;
A king I'm elected, my people adore
And diadems on my head rain.
Some mischance makes me myself again;
I'm fat John as before.

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nothing I can do. I pfear we could no longer carry you on our mission roll in any event—"

"Why not?"

"Because since your arrival on Krishna you have managed to put yourself in a—well, a very compromising light. Pfarst you get intoxicated and marry Mr. Gorchakov—"

"But he was the one—" cried Althea.

"I daresay there were extenuating sarcumstances, but the central fact remains. Then you run away with Mr. Kirwan and Dr. Bahr, telling people they are your lovers."

"But that was only to get us across the ferry—"

"I suppose so, but the story is still sarculating, and we must avoid even the appearance of evil among our parsonnel. And lastly I find you on Zesh, hardly clad in accordance with the dictates of the inspired Getulio Cão."

Althea had forgotten about being unclad, since so many others around her were naked also. She could have given Raman an explanation for this state of affairs too, but as he had evidently made up his mind it seemed hardly worth while.

"So," concluded the bishop with an oleaginous smile, "it is better for you to retarn to your lawful husband. At least he will farnish you with support, and no doubt you will in time learn to adapt your parsonality to his."

"Exactly," concurred Gorchakov. "Now come along, *byednyashka.*"

"Devil ye say!" cried Kirwan. "D'ye think the great Brian Kirwan'll stand by to see our little American rose carried off by a crass gorilla from the steppes, assisted by a mealy-mouthed, toadying heretic of a bishop? Be damned to you!"

Kirwan stooped and picked up a large safq-shell, about the size and weight of a full-grown Terran conch. As he drew back his arm to throw the object at Gorchakov, the latter's pistol roared.

Kirwan tumbled backwards as if struck by a mighty blow. His chest was blown open, fragments of lung and bone showing whitely through the bubbling blood.

Althea, like the others, jumped at the explosion. She tensed herself to run, but a bark from Gorchakov stopped her. The security-officer was still in command of the situation.

"Is good," he said, looking at Kirwan's corpse. "I would have killed the other too, only he ran into woods when he saw me getting out of boat. Now come, quick!"

HOW LIKE Gottfried Bahr, thought Althea, beginning a slow march towards the boat. But then, if he hadn't run, he probably would have been killed. She looked back desperately at Yuruzh, still standing with his hand on his sword-hilt but not otherwise moving. All other organic sounds—the hammering and chatter of the Záva—had ceased, as all the tailed men were looking at Gorchakov. The surf boomed and swished in the silence.

Yuruzh said: "Oh, Mr. Gorchakov!"

"What is?"

"As security-officer of Novorecife, how did you violate your own regulations to let yourself carry a gun out of the port?"

"Regulations are what I say they are. Me, Afanasi Gorchakov. You-mind your own business, or you get shot too. Hurry up, Althea."

"Can't I put on some clothes first?"

"They wouldn't stay on long enough to be worth while. Get in boat."

The bishop said: "Mr. Gorchakov, there isn't room for three passengers in the dinghy."

"Hokay, you stay behind."

"But my dear man," bleated the bishop, "I can't possibly—"

"You want to get shot? All right then, shut up."

"You could at least send the boat back for me. . . ." wailed Raman.

Ignoring him, Gorchakov herded Althea into the dinghy. As if in a nightmare she saw the tailless Krishnan sailors push off and row out between a couple of Daryao hulks. The figures on

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the beach got smaller and smaller and then were hidden by the ships. The dinghy pulled up beside the roundship, and Gorchakov gestured with his pistol to indicate that Althea should climb up the rope ladder to the deck. The people of the merchant-ship stared at her in mild wonderment as she clambered over the rail.

"Come with me," said Gorchakov, swarming up after her.

He shouted to the captain to get under way and led Althea aft as the dinghy was hoisted aboard and the sails filled. Down a short flight of stairs he took her, bending to avoid hitting his head, and into a stern cabin. He pushed her roughly in and closed and bolted the door.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, fearing that she already knew.

"You will see." Gorchakov glanced out the cabin window in the stern of the ship. Althea recognized the change in the ship's motion that betokened its getting under way.

Gorchakov said, "With this wind we ought to get to Ulvanagh before tomorrow morning. That is, I will get there. You won't."

"What do you mean?"

Gorchakov hauled a length of rope out of a wall-cabinet, grabbed Althea, and tied her to a post that supported one corner of the bunk and at the same time formed a part of the ship.

"I mean you will be dead." Gorchakov examined one of his knots and re-tied it more securely. "I am going to kill you."

He laid his pistol on top of a wall-cabinet and peeled off his shirt. Then he took a bottle of kvad out of the cabinet, sat down, and drank a gurgling gulp from the bottle.

"But why?" Althea tried to keep back the tears. "I've never hurt you."

"Such foolish questions you ask!" Another gulp. "I told you once you would learn the Russian hate. Well, now you got a lot more of it to learn. You not only run away; you make me look like a fool with those two."

"So, now comes the time. I will kill you, but only a little by little." Gorchakov thrust his face forward, teeth bared. "First I will beat you. Then I will pull your hair out. Then I beat you some more. Then I break some bones, or maybe gouge out an eye. Then I beat you some more. Then I bite some pieces out of you, or maybe I skin you with my knife. And so it goes."

He took another drink, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and continued, "If I do it just right I can make you last till we almost reach Ulvanagh, and then push you out through that window. I made sure the window was big enough when I bought passage." He laughed loudly. "How do you like that, eh? That will teach you to spit on a man who offered you honest love."

FOR THE next hour Gorchakov sat in his chair, alternately drinking from his bottle and telling Althea the things that he intended to do to her. Althea cried and pleaded with him, which only made him laugh. Then he got sentimental and wept with self-pity over the cruel and faithless treatment that he had sustained from his beloved bride, and over his impending widowerhood. Then back to threats and curses.

At last the bottle was empty. Gorchakov looked around for a waste-receptacle. Finding none, he walked, showing no signs of drunkenness, over to the cabin window, unlatched and opened it, and threw the bottle out. Without bothering to close the window he strode back and slapped Althea's face, one-two.

"Just a beginning," he said. "Where did I put my whip?"

He rummaged until he found it. He tested it by cracking it a couple of times, then hauled off and let fly.

The lash hissed and cracked against Althea's skin, plowing a diagonal red welt from her left shoulder down between her small breasts to her lower right ribs. Althea shrieked.

A metallic streak shot across the cabin. A thrown knife struck Gorchakov

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in the right upper arm, penetrating the biceps muscle to a depth of several centimeters.

With a yell Gorchakov dropped the whip and snatched the knife out of the wound. As he did so, Yuruzh catapulted into the cabin.

Gorchakov hesitated a fraction of a second, glancing from the knife in his left fist to the pistol on top of the cabinet. With a second's more warning he could have reached the pistol and blasted the life out of his assailant, but with Yuruzh hurtling towards him he did not have time. Instead, he struck at the tailed man with an overhand stab.

Yuruzh blocked the stab, caught Gorchakov's wrist, and twisted. They reeled around the cabin, fighting for the knife, and several times knocked the wind out of Althea by bumping into her. Then she was confusedly aware that Gorchakov had dropped the knife and was lunging for the cabinet on which lay the gun, but Yuruzh caught him around the waist from behind and, though Gorchakov was the larger, threw him against the opposite wall. Then as they came together again Gorchakov tried to strangle Yuruzh. The latter seized one of Gorchakov's choking fingers and bent it back until the joint cracked and gave. They blundered about, punching, kicking, wrestling, gouging, biting, banging into the walls of the narrow space and falling over the furniture.

Then Yuruzh had Gorchakov pinned; both were kneeling; facing into a corner, with Yuruzh behind Gorchakov. Yuruzh gripped the wrist of Gorchakov's left arm with his own right, twisting it behind Gorchakov's back. Yuruzh's left arm was employed in trying to keep Gorchakov's chin up so that the Russian would not bite him, while Gorchakov's right arm, now nearly useless between wounded upper arm and broken finger, made feeble clawing motions.

BEHIND Yuruzh on the floor lay the knife. Yuruzh glanced back, then reached out with his tail. Though the organ was not truly prehensile, the Zao chief managed to sweep the weapon forward until a quick snatch with his right hand secured it. He prodded the point into Gorchakov's ribs until he found a likely spot and pushed slowly, moving the blade about as it sank centimeter by centimeter. Gorchakov screamed.

Yuruzh pushed further. Gorchakov coughed bloody froth. When the blade had sunk to the hilt. Yuruzh withdrew it, found another spot just above the kidneys, and thrust it in again.

Bit by bit Gorchakov relaxed. As Yuruzh let go of him he slid to the floor, eyes rolling upward and limbs twitching.

Yuruzh examined the body, then carefully placed the point over Gorchakov's heart and gave another thrust for good measure. Gorchakov gave a final shudder and lay still.

Yuruzh looked up at Althea, saying, "Well, young lady, I seem always to meet you when you're tied to a post and some villain's about to do you in. Are you hurt?"

"No," said Althea. "Not seriously. How about you?"

"Just a few contusions and abrasions."

He cut her loose. Though Althea had never fainted in her life, she came close to it now. She swayed and fell forward into Yuruzh's arms. He held her against his broad hairy chest, and when she looked up he unexpectedly bent and kissed her: not wildly and brutally as Kirwan had done, but tenderly.

"You're amazing," said Althea. Feeling oddly dizzy and breathless, she sank down upon the bed.

Yuruzh, when he released her, went over to the wash-stand to remove some of the blood with which he was smeared and spattered. Much of it came from his own many cuts and scratches. Althea asked:

"How did you get here?"

Yuruzh smiled. "As soon as you boarded the *Ta'zu* I put to sea in one of my galleys and hung off this ship's quarter. When the skipper of the *Ta'zu* signalled asking what we wanted, I

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flagged him back to go on and pay no attention. As we had a catapult loaded with a fifty-kilo rock aimed at his waterline he was glad to comply.

"When nobody shot at us I figured Gorchakov must have taken you below. I'd brought Bishop Raman along, pretending I'd meant merely to put him on his ship, and he told me he and Gorchakov had the two passenger cabins aft. He didn't realize Gorchakov didn't want him aboard at all because he didn't wish any Terran witness to his murder of you. So knowing the lay of the land I rowed my ship in close, threw a grapnell over the *Ta'zu's* rail, and swung over to the ledge below the stern windows. I got the idea from a motion-picture I saw on Terra, something about pirates.

"I didn't dare warn Gorchakov so long as he carried that gun; not even I can fence or wrestle a bullet. I originally meant to climb in Raman's window, but then Gorchakov threw that bottle out—just missing me—and left his window open. So here we are."

Yuruzh wiped himself with the bloody towel and glanced at Gorchakov. Althea asked: "What shall we do with him?"

Yuruzh jerked a thumb towards the stern window. "Out."

"That's what he was going to do with me."

"Ironic justice, eh? Let's hope he's not too big to go through."

Before Althea had left Earth, she could not possibly have imagined that she would some day be helping to dispose of a corpse in this manner, let alone the corpse of a husband slain in a brutal brawl. The mere idea would have made her sick. But now she grasped a wrist and an ankle of the late Afanasi Gorchakov with no more revulsion than one has about picking up a chicken leg. She helped Yuruzh to drag the body to the window, heave it up and shove it through. *Splash!*

She dispassionately glimpsed the body bobbing in the ship's wake, then turned away from the window. Yuruzh picked the pistol off the cabinet.

"This will be useful," he said. "I wonder if the scoundrel didn't have a second bottle of kvad?"

"Look in that cabinet, lower right," said Althea.

"Ah, here we are! Good old Afanasi. Have some?"

Althea was about to say that as a missionary she couldn't when she remembered that she was no longer a missionary. The feeling was desolate and apprehensive on one hand, but a relief on the other. Now at least she could believe, as Bahr had taught her to do, what the evidence indicated, not necessarily what Getulio Cão ordained to be so.

And certainly if any organisms in the history of her and Yuruzh's respective species had ever deserved a drink, they did now. The liquor burned her throat and made her cough, but presently the throb of her welt and the ache of her limbs subsided.

YURUZH drank deeply and said: "What are you going to do now, my dear? Your mission job seems to have blown up, and Bahr won't be on Zesh more than a few ten-nights taking his tests. What'll you do then?"

"I don't know. I might try to get back to Earth, but that means going through Novorecife, where Glumelin might make trouble for me."

"Bahr was looking at you with that hungry-wolf expression. For that matter so was Kirwan, but the fool got himself unnecessarily killed."

Althea said: "Gottfried has been asking me to marry him; that is, when I could get Gorchakov annulled."

Yuruzh glanced toward the stern window. "He's annulled now, all right," he murmured. "Have you accepted Bahr?"

"No."

"May I ask why not?"

"I don't know—he's intelligent and much easier to get on with than that crazy poet. But he's cold and colorless. Besides, he ran out on me. I'm afraid he just hasn't much physical courage, and you need that here."

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"I have an alternative suggestion."

"What?" said Althea.

"You might marry me."

"*What!* But you're not—not—"

"Not human, you mean to say? Of course I'm not. But it's possible for a Krishnan and a Terran to live quite happily together. Been done."

"We couldn't have children. . . ."

Yuruzh smiled. "I couldn't anyway. Sterile hybrid, you know, though in other respects quite—ah—normal."

"But—but—"

"I trust you're not letting yourself be influenced by the fact that I have a tail? I believe the god Pan had one, which didn't prevent his being held in high esteem by the ancient Greeks. In fact every unaccountable pregnancy was attributed to Pan's having caught the girl while she was watching the family sheep and demonstrating his love of humanity on her."

Althea said: "Let me think a while. My goodness, I've only just met you! The idea makes me dizzy. Nobody's offered to marry me for years, and here as soon as I land on Krishna . . . listen, Yuruzh, what's the secret of Zá? What about this amazing intelligence?"

"Simple. While I was at the Institute at Princeton a psychologist gave me the Pannoëtic treatment, telling me it would either drive me hopelessly mad, as it does Terrans, or make me a genius, as it does apes. And it had the latter effect. I'm not bragging; I went right through the ceiling on all their tests. But when the time came for me to return to Krishna, I pretended that the effect had worn off, knowing they'd never let me go home otherwise. The *Viagens* had introduced the Saint-Rémy treatment to keep Terrans from spilling technical secrets to Krishnans, but it doesn't work very well on Krishnans, and how would they keep me from using all the knowledge I'd picked up? So I acted dumb enough to fool them, and they never even conditioned me by the Saint-Rémy method."

"What are you doing now?"

"Turning all the Záva into people like me, by the same method. I have a fourth of them converted, and the rest will be done in a year. We're doing the opposite of the Roussellians: making truly civilized beings out of savages."

"What's the Virgin of Zesh?"

"A vestigial organ. When the Záva were all stupid primitives they consulted an oracle for advice the more incomprehensible the better. We still maintain old Khostova in her tower so as not to alarm the unconverted Záva, who don't know what Pannoëtics is all about." He leaned forward. "You know, if you take me up, you'll find yourself in a position to be very useful. While I don't think much of Cão's theology, some of his ethical ideas aren't bad. And when you suddenly convert a dumb primitive to a fellow with an intelligence like that of Newton or Einstein, you need ethical indoctrination to keep him from misusing his new brain. Besides, ever since I laid eyes on you, I told myself: that's the mate for you, my boy. How about it?"

Althea though, what if he were not human? She, too, had always been something of a misfit among her own kind. He thrilled her as no man—correction, male organism—had in many years. And he was really little hairier than Kirwan or Halevi. So, not without some apprehensions, she made up her mind.

"Why—I—ah—well—*yes!*"

As his arms closed round her, she felt as if she had come home at last. When they unclinched, Yuruzh said:

"We'll go up and tell the captain of the *Ta'zu* his passenger has committed suicide by jumping out the transom window, and order him to put about and sail back to Zesh. He can marry us, too, unless you want the bishop brought over in a boatswain's chair from the galley."

"The captain will suit me," said Althea. "Bishop Raman can jump in the Sadabao Sea for all I care."

"Fine. And until we get back, I suggest we use the bishop's cabin next door. This one's a mess, isn't it?"

Hand in hand they went out the cabin door into the sunshine. ● ● ●

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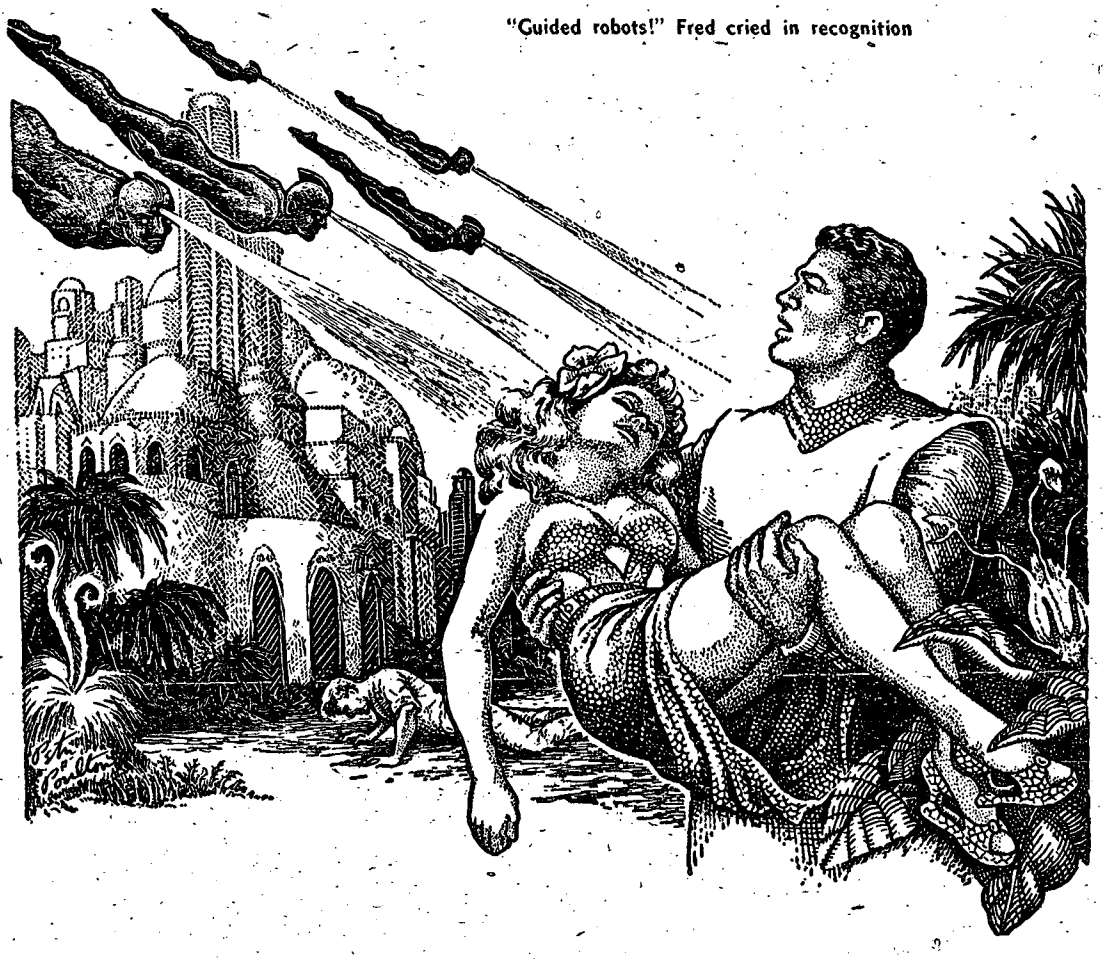

"Guided robots!" Fred cried in recognition

DARK NUPTIAL

By ROBERT DONALD LOCKE

The second honeymoon was even happier than the first . . . but they had to die to enjoy it. . . .

THE rocket from Tycho crashed at seven A.M. near Radium Hot Springs in the Arizona desert, the survivors and the dead being whisked off to Yuma shortly after.

Despite the best of automatic steering and pinpoint astrogation, the craft had missed the Phoenix spaceport by more than a hundred and twenty miles, and the resulting clamor just about finished the slow-moving passenger transport between the inner planets.

The beam transmission stations were riding a high tide of business. Following the crash, their public relations staff played up the accident until the stock of

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those space vessel corporations which did not handle freight exclusively reached a new low on the boards at the New York Stock Exchange.

But all the sound and fury did nothing to assuage the grief and sorrow of Fred Jenkins, citizen of Strabo, when he awoke in the white aseptic hospital cell and faced a grim bevy of doctors and nurses, whose anxious faces told him what their lips hesitated to voice.

"Where's Iris!" Jenkins demanded to know. "What happened to my wife? She was with me on the rocket—I remember a sheet of blinding flame! Then, we began to fall! The desert rushed toward us like a gulping whirlpool—"

"Your wife is dead," announced the spokesman for the assembled staff. The strain on his face reflected the conflict between the man's obvious desire to soften the blow and his decision to deliver it straightforward, letting his patient roll with the punch.

"Iris was—?"

"—killed instantly in the crash. A merciful death."

"Oh, dear God," cried Fred Jenkins, turning his face to the wall in agony. "Let me die, too."

But, science, antibiotics and the will of healthy protoplasm to survive pulled Jenkins enough out of his grief-provoked mental slump that his medical attendants were able in a few days to predict his complete physical recovery.

As to a possible spiritual recuperation, they could not say. Too many emotion factors were present, and doctoring the injured psyche did not fall in their province.

By the third week following the disaster, Jenkins had achieved ambulatory status as a patient; by the fifth week, he was undergoing plastic surgery to repair minor damage to his face, and his sixth and seventh weeks were spent in final therapy, lapping up heavy doses of the southwestern sun.

UPON discharge, Fred Jenkins' incipient loneliness became actual. Dread assailed him at thought of returning to Strabo without Iris to share with him the rigors and wonder of Lunar life.

He boarded a tube car to Phoenix, where he arranged for the sale of his ranch on Luna, and then bought a small cottage on Encanto Boulevard, spending most of his quiet afternoons poking around the site of the old Fair Grounds.

The lovely image of his lost wife continued to haunt his every waking moment. As a golden-haired, blue-eyed representative of the vanishing Nordic race, she had been a much sought-after prize when he won her.

Perhaps that was why, during all the fragile hours of their too-short marriage, he had been tormented with a morbid premonition. Jenkins felt that their marriage was doomed to end too soon, much as the brief existence of the splendid Monarch butterfly passes with the summer.

Now, the uneasy prophecy had turned into a dreadfully real nightmare, and he could not bear to look at the silver-specked Moon in the cloudless desert sky above him.

The three-dimensional video shows failed to entertain him, even though full color telecasts were reported to be just around the corner. Book tapes and music reels had also lost their flavor.

He was like a sleep-walker, living yet dead; an exile from the rest of the human race.

Occasionally, he would rent a helicopter and make pleasure jaunts over McDowell Peak and the Roosevelt Reservoir, until one day the jagged terrain below him commenced to resemble some of the less rugged Lunar areas. Then, he gave up even these flights.

ONE afternoon, some six months after the crash of the Tycho rocket and three months after the reorganization of several space transport firms into even stronger competition to the newer but more expensive matter transmitters, Fred Jenkins was seated in his garden of

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cholla flowers and yucca when a caller appeared at his gate.

"Mr. Jenkins?" the newcomer inquired, threading his way across the sandy soil.

Fred Jenkins surveyed his caller. He saw a young man approximately his own age, attired in the conservative style of the East with a lavender shirt and red-striped shin-length trousers.

His face was thin and a slight ripple at the hairline revealed his toupee. Under his arm he carried a light briefcase.

"Mr. Jenkins, I'm Joe Farley," the newcomer said, with outstretched hand. "Inner World Beam Transmission Company. Just tubed into Phoenix a few minutes ago. First thing I wanted to do was see you."

Fred Jenkins eyed him suspiciously, but accepted the handshake.

"You're wondering why I'd look you up," Farley went on. "Well, to me, Fred Jenkins is a very important man. Very important. This is going to be quite a shock to you."

"What is?"

"The proposition I'm about to make. How would you like your wife back?"

Jenkins' mouth gaped open. Then, a long bitter line replaced his slack-jawed astonishment. "Maybe, you've got the wrong Jenkins," he said, coldly. "My wife is dead."

Dead legally, perhaps," said Farley. But not for keeps. And you're the right Jenkins, all right."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Give me a few minutes of your time, Mr. Jenkins. I'll explain everything. And I think you'll like what I've got to say."

Fred Jenkins thoughtfully watched the progress of a horned toad across a row of leaves. He tugged at his left ear. Finally, he looked up. "All right, I'll listen," he said. "Let's go in the house."

INSIDE, the two men relaxed before a broad paneled electronic fireplace, whose chill screen reflected a landscape of cascading falls and green mosses on Venus. Jenkins signaled to the wall and a robot drink dispenser placed two highballs at their disposal.

Joe Farley sipped briefly, then set aside his frosted glass. Unbuckling his briefcase, he said, "Might as well be frank about this. I'm public relations counsel for Inner World. Which is just a high class word for space grabber. Supposed to get my firm's name in all the facsimile sheets and telecasts. Needless to say, my ulcers require excising every spring."

"You mentioned my wife," Jenkins gestured, impatiently.

"Getting to that. Getting to that. Beam transmission's new, but its popular. You made a beam trip once, didn't you?"

"Yes. About a year ago."

"Mars to Earth, wasn't it?"

Jenkins looked surprised. "Our third anniversary, last summer. But how did you know?"

"I checked on the records. Fred and Iris Jenkins, bound for Terra. Transmission 6B-18180. You were in a hurry to get home. Space ship transport too slow for once, eh?"

"That one time, yes. We had the chance to enlarge our holdings at Strabo and make a real ranch of it. So, we cut short our vacation."

"Did the trip bother you?" Farley asked.

"Not too much. As I recall, I had no sense of time interval whatsoever. Iris said she developed a rather tickling sensation afterwards. Used to tease her about not getting assembled quite right."

"Think you'd ever want to make such a trip again?"

Fred Jenkins shook his head. "I'll never leave Earth again. Not for any reason."

Farley sampled some more of his drink. His face lost its taut lines. "Don't know how much you know about matter transmission, but I'd like to review it a little for you."

"Go ahead — not too technical, mind you."

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Farley smiled. "My technical knowledge wouldn't qualify me for third engineer. The beam involves tricky math, even trickier gadgetry. Germanium elements replace the traditional vacuum tubes, or a city block couldn't house the station. A scanning device, sort of a three-dimensional ortho-iconoscope, compiles in matrix form the entire molecular structure of the object to be transmitted.

"You, Mr. Jenkins, at one point in the process, are nothing but a mathematical memory."

"Go on," directed Fred. "I'm listening."

"The information on the matrix is transmitted over tight sub-etheric waves to a receiving station at a velocity equal to that of gravitation. Which has thus far proved to be virtually instantaneous."

"Hey, wait a second!" Jenkins interrupted. "Seems to me it took us forty-five minutes to get from Mars last summer."

FARLEY held up a finger in mock irony. "That's our bottleneck you bumped up against. Not enough transmitters."

"Build some more."

"Can't. Scarce materials right now. So what happens? Patrons get stacked up. The same way a local skyport will have to stack up jets to wait their turn at landing. On a busy day, thirty or forty matrices at a time may be waiting for a ride on the beam. You were one of them that day. And so was your wife."

"That accounts for the delay, huh?"

"Very much so. Here's a secret Inner World's never yet divulged. These matrices, following transmission, are not destroyed but *filed*. Thus, should a receiving station fail to operate—" Here, Farley raised his right hand solemnly, "—and I swear one never has failed yet, we would be prepared to re-transmit. In some one hundred thousand transmissions the past year, we have yet to lose a passenger."

"That's a good record," Jenkins admitted.

"Good? It's perfect. Space vessels—by way of contrast—have suffered losses amounting to two per cent. An outrageous figure, when you consider how many backward people are still using that old-fashioned method of transport. Getting back to the matrices—"

"Iris — my wife —!" Fred Jenkins gripped his own trembling hands and stood up on wobbly legs. "You mean, she's—?"

"Still in our files? Yes. Still in matrix form."

"Tell me again. What are you saying—?"

"I'm saying that an actual mathematical duplicate of Mrs. Jenkins, molecule for molecule, is available to you by the magic of beam transmission. Minus, of course, the memories of those months that have passed since the day of your arrival from Mars."

"I don't care," cried Jenkins. "As long as there's a way to get my wife back, that's all that matters! If I've got to have her without any memories at all, I still want her. She's mine. With Iris, I'd be like a resurrected man, myself."

"That's better than ever. Two people would come to life."

Joe Farley, brash in manner as he was, appeared visibly shaken by this display of overwrought emotion he had provoked. His arm slid around Jenkins, supporting the hysterical widower as he helped him back to his seat. It was disturbing to see a grown man weep, especially when his tears were mixed with equal spasms of joy.

But, Farley had not forgotten the purpose of his mission. From his briefcase, he brought out a paper and handed it to his host, together with permo-pen. "Then, Inner World's got your permission to re-transmit Mrs. Jenkins' matrix?"

"Yes, yes. By all means." Jenkins hurriedly scratched his signature.

"Very well, then," said Farley. "You'll have your wife in three days, Fred. Inner

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World wants no money. But we'd like permission to see the event gets full coverage in press and video."

"Anything. Anything you say," Jenkins told him. without raising his cupped head from between his hands.

"Great," said Farley, picking up his modest three-toned hat. He paused at the door, to add, "Thanks for the drink. We'll be seeing you."

ORDINARILY, the video reels of the resurrection would have created journalistic history. But in this case a cabinet crisis on Venus and a threat of civil war devoured all the terrestrial headlines.

Enough of a splash accompanied the presentation, so that despite the newsworthy competition on the next planet, Joe Farley later felt justified in accepting the "Hannegan" statuette awarded him for the best flack job of the year.

To publicize the event called for a party, heavy on canapés and caviar. Thus it was that a somewhat terrified Fred Jenkins, bearing little resemblance to the rancher who had jeeped rough-tired over Lunar landscapes only twelve months before, was deprived of the supreme joy of meeting his re-created wife in privacy.

Instead, the reunion took place in Inner World's luxurious board room, where Jenkins found himself surrounded by pompous directors of the company, assiduous vice-presidents, photogenic models in gorgeous Venusian silks paid for by the vice-presidents, and two relatively unobtrusive bartenders who poured out exotic, semi-poisonous cocktails from recipes popular on all the lesser planets.

After the major guests had arrived, a process requiring an hour or more of raucous laughter, smoke-crammed air and bad jokes about the un-spaceworthiness of interplanetary vessels, Fred Jenkins saw Joe Farley raise a jeweled cuff to cue the video scanner operators.

A small band in the corner produced a blast of fanfare.

"Ladies and gentlemen, bosses and honored guests," Farley announced in the silence that followed; "we're here to witness something unique in the annals of science. A development totally unparalleled in the history of mankind. But one that may herald a new age of the human race."

Polite cheers and huzzahs were voiced by the beaming vice-presidents and the silk-clad models.

"There is a man among us, a victim of carelessness and inefficiency in transport," Farley continued, "who is about to be rescued from his long and unnecessary mourning.

"Through the foresight of Inner World in preserving the matrices of all human beam transmissions, Fred Jenkins is being united with a person he had thought lost to him forever.

"Will somebody please ask Mrs. Jenkins to step in?"

THE two faced each other across the hushed room; lovers once separated by death, but now brought together as if their grim enemy had never existed.

She was lovelier than ever, lovelier than the image in any of the agonizing dreams he had experienced during his lonely nights of torture after the rocket crash.

"Iris!"

"Fred, my darling!"

"You're real. I can't believe it."

"Of course, I'm real. Kiss me, Fred."

"My wonderful wife, I never dreamed —never thought I'd ever have you again."

Their lips met. Their bodies clung. The cameras ground away, but they were totally unaware of anyone else in the room.

"It's been so long, Iris."

"So long?"

"Since it happened. Since I lost you."

"Yes, it has. We got separated somehow. What happened, Fred?"

"They haven't told you?"

"I've been so confused, recently. They said I couldn't see you for awhile. I said

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I had to. We had a chance to buy more land on Strabo. You needed my name on the papers. They said it could wait."

"Then, what?"

"Then they kept me in a hotel room. Two or three days, I think. I was treated very nicely. New clothes, delightful meals. But, I wanted you, Fred. Only you."

"They didn't tell you about the accident?"

"Accident? What accident?"

"Coming in from the Moon. The rocket turning into a sheet of flame . . . the desert whirling about over our heads . . ."

"But, we didn't take a space ship, Fred. We took the beam. And we came from Mars. Home from our vacation. We haven't returned to Luna, yet."

Fred Jenkins attempted to control the tremor launched by his nerves. This was Iris' soft flesh he held in his arms. Iris' lips that brushed against his, Iris' guileless blue eyes that met his own.

But something was missing—and Joe Farley had predicted it.

Iris had no memory of any events past the time when the beam station had recorded the matrix of her corporeal form.

HE BROUGHT her home to the little cottage on Encanto, taking care to destroy all the news accounts he had preserved concerning the crash, the photographs he had made of the grave in Yuma, the letters from both sides of the family consoling him on his loss.

He wanted to avoid shocking her.

Then, in his own quiet way, he related to her what had happened in the months following their return from Mars, culminating with the disastrous voyage from Strabo and the subsequent offer of Inner World Beam Transmission to make the amazing restitution.

Iris listened to all he had to say, but it was clear she understood little of it.

"But, it can't be," she protested, puzzlement marking her pretty features. "I'm not dead. I'm very much alive. Pinch me. Don't I feel like a living person? I've never been dead."

A vague uneasiness coursed through Fred.

"I know it's hard to believe," he said. "Perhaps, it's better if we don't think about it too much."

He showed her the facsimile sheets that clearly indicated the year and the date.

She still refused to believe.

It was then he regretted tearing up the other evidence.

He tuned in on the telecasts which still occasionally mentioned the miraculous resurrection.

Iris declared the publicity was faked.

"Don't you see?" she said. "I was never released from the matter transmitter, like you were. I've got it! They kept me confined — under drugs perhaps — until they were ready to spring their *coup*. Or perhaps, I had amnesia? Oh Fred, you've been the victim of a horrible plot."

"No, Iris." He shook his head, grave eyes mirroring his concern. "I'm afraid you're wrong. You must face the truth, darling."

"But, what is the truth?"

"What I have told you. I lived with you several more months, following that beam trip. A beautiful, idyllic existence —as was all our life together."

"With me?"

"With Iris. *An Iris,* maybe. The one who is dead, now. But what does it matter? You share her thoughts, her memories. You are *her*. She was *you*."

"I hate her. She stole part of your life from me."

"Not her, *you*. Only you don't remember. Why can't you pretend it was amnesia, like you said? Then, everything would adjust of its own accord."

The vague uneasiness in Fred kept growing.

ANOTHER day. They had checked out a helicopter and were flying over the Great Meteor Crater near Winslow.

"I think it's about time we moved back

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to Strabo," Fred said.

"Our old place?" asked Iris.

"No. I sold it. Don't you remember?"

"How could I?"

"I'm sorry. I forgot. We would have to start over. But, it would be a good life."

"I couldn't bear it. I couldn't bear to see a place where you had spent months with some one else."

"But those months were spent with you."

"Not with me. With her."

"Her. You. Don't you understand? You're the only Iris I know."

But she wasn't, he reminded himself. *He was lying.*

"No, I don't understand that," she said. "I understand you're the only Fred Jenkins in my life. But this other thing, Fred. It's beyond me. Please help me grasp it. Maybe the beam transmission did something to my brain cells."

"Nonsense!"

But finally he began believing it himself. Well, almost.

He became unhappy. Life palled, as it had for him in the days following the burial of the first Iris. Finally, he took a tube to New York and sought out Joe Farley in the great offices of Inner World.

There he told Farley, "Something is wrong."

Farley only grinned, but there was apprehension in his face. This was one stunt he couldn't afford to have backfire.

"Something's wrong? What?"

"You haven't given me my wife back. You've given me a stranger."

"That," said Farley, "is simply not true."

"I've got Iris' body," said Jenkins. "But, not her soul."

"Have you been talking to a preacher?"

"No. It's my own feeling."

"Fred, believe me. Your wife has as much soul as any person who's ever been transmitted by beam. If she doesn't, then I hate to think of the thousands of poor humans we've de-souled in the past year. Now, what's really wrong?"

Fred Jenkins sat down and told him.

When he was through, Farley said, "I'll arrange to have a psychiatrist examine her. There may be something actually off-base. But my opinion is that it's all in your own head. Meanwhile, I'd appreciate it if you'd keep this from the press. Whatever we do, we can't let Inner World get involved in religious speculation."

He shook hands and sped his departing caller. "Don't worry, Fred. Everything's going to be all atomic. Keep your chin up."

THE psychiatrist who tubed to Phoenix a day later was a world expert on aberrations. He examined Iris from cranium to phalanges, gave her Rorshach and other mental tests, took a brain-wave reading, and concluded, "She's sound as a gold-piece, Jenkins. Mind's okay, too. Little depression, but that's only natural — considering the notoriety you two've been through."

"But, I tell you, Doc, she's not the same woman as my own Iris."

The specialist smiled. "Got you convinced of that, has she? Well, in a way, it's true. Statistically, she's not the woman you buried—but that's only to be expected. After all, virtually every atom of her body is different. But that's got nothing to do with what ticks inside."

"What am I going to do?"

"Adjust to the situation."

"But, I can't."

"Of course, you can. Don't be medieval. Because she lacks certain memories you think she ought to have, she makes errors. You accumulate them, sort them in your mind, come to the conclusion you've been saddled with a different person. Her own confusion and bewilderment add to the impression. She thinks she's different—that she's the only Iris Jenkins that ever existed. Convinced of it as she is, naturally she helps strengthen the vague suspicion in your own mind that she's a different

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woman from the wife who died."

"That's exactly it."

"You've got to fight it. Don't you see that every human being changes into a totally different person from minute to minute, throughout all his life? Each new experience contributes to personality change."

"Granted."

"Well, if you had continued to be the same Fred Jenkins you were the day your transmission matrix was formed, this Iris Jenkins would seem the same Iris to you that you had always known. But now she's acquired a complex that causes her to doubt her own existence, a complex she fights by asserting that the other Iris, the buried one, was unreal. Her mind is undergoing a stress which threatens to destroy it."

"Can't we eliminate that stress?"

"It'll vanish eventually of its own accord—I assure you. But in the meanwhile, in an effort to get out from under it, your wife has transferred part of her reaction to the situation to your shoulders. You're just as sick as she is."

"But—how?"

"Because she's got you believing she's a different Iris Jenkins, too—when she's not."

"What's my solution?"

"Let time ride it out, I'd say. But you might do this. Why don't you just imagine you've been away from Iris since the day you arrived on Earth from your Martian vacation? If that were true, she'd seem like the same wife to you. Do your best, my boy, to blot out the image of the woman you actually lived with those following months."

"I'll try, Doctor."

FRED and Iris worked very hard to create a new life together. Fred agreed never to mention the months he had lived between the making of the matrix and the creation of the new Iris.

During the summer they went to Strabo but were unable to capture the magic of their idyllic past. After a fretful fortnight, they rocketed back to Tycho, pleasure capital of the satellite. There they plunged into a vicious cycle of night clubbing and thrill-hunting.

It was Iris who tired first of their new futile existence.

"We've got to stop this," she said one morning, as both awoke to splitting *narcoma* hangovers. "I begin to see now, what your psychiatrist meant about *running away from reality.* That's just what I've done, and just what you're doing, Fred."

"Don't lecture to me," he groaned.

"But, I must. I see now, there really is only one Iris. What body I occupy makes no difference. If I inhabited a hundred, I would still be *me.* It's like discovering immortality."

"That's not so," shouted Fred. "You change."

"But, darling—"

"You're a fraud," he charged. "You're not my Iris. All these months, I've been fooled. I've lived with a manufactured imitation—"

"You don't know what you're saying!"

"Don't I? Now, I understand why you weren't the same—"

"Fred!"

"You have no soul," he declared triumphantly. "That's what's wrong! No soul!"

Her tear-spattered face stared at him in enlightened horror.

When Joe Farley met them at the Phoenix spaceport, he was gesturing frantically at a facsimile sheet he carried.

"Tell me it's not so!" he said.

Fred and Iris Jenkins cast a short meaningful glance at each other, then nodded dolefully.

"And the damnedest grounds," continued Joe. *"Wife is soulless duplicate,* husband accuses. *Husband refuses to recognize mate's identity,* says wife. What kind of gag is this?"

"We've made up our minds. Our marriage can't go on."

"But you'll ruin our entire campaign. Inner World's been authorized materials to branch out to Ganymede and Callisto.

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If people get a libelous impression of the transmitters, oh brother—!"

"Can't be helped," said Fred disconsolately.

"Look," said Joe Farley. "Inner World's very much interested in your case. Prestige of the company's at stake, you might say. Isn't there something we can do?"

"Not a thing."

"Iris?" Farley turned to Mrs. Jenkins.

Her blue eyes gave him the same answer.

"I don't like it," said Farley, nervously. "Don't like it at all."

HE STOOD his ground a moment; then his face broke into a wreath of smiles like Edison discovering the incandescent filament.

"I've got it. Where'd you folks spend your honeymoon?"

"Venus," Fred Jenkins admitted, nervously.

"Sure. On Lake Heisenberg, wasn't it? Beautiful spot. Know it myself."

"Not Heisenberg," said Fred. "It was Lake Smyth."

"I remember you telling me about it, now. How's this for a deal? I believe I can talk Inner World into giving you a free beam trip to Venus and back—for a second honeymoon. That strike you?"

Both members of the Jenkins family looked slightly doubtful.

"All expenses paid. And no newshounds plaguing you, after you get there. I promise it. You folks can start a new life, like you'd never been married before. Get acquainted all over again. And if you still don't like each other, you can get a separation on Venus in twenty-four hours. Lot faster than Terra."

Iris turned to Fred, her eyes pleading.

"We ought to give ourselves one more chance," she told him. "I accepted you when I was re-duplicated. Maybe, in different surroundings, you could learn to feel the same about me. Even if we don't get any further than the way you felt about me when you first brought me home to the cottage on Encanto. I'd be satisfied with *just* that again."

"You hear her talking," interposed Joe Farley. "C'mon, Fred. Be a sport."

"All right," said Fred. "We go to Venus. But it's the last beam trip I'll ever take—if things don't work out."

"Fair enough," said Joe Farley.

Rubbing his hands contentedly, he started to leave.

"One more thing," Fred called after him, his brow wrinkled. "Isn't a rebellion about to bust out on Venus?"

"An uprising? Not that I know of."

"The video channels keep mentioning something along that line. I thought . . . ."

"Forget it," said Joe. "I'm a newspaperman, myself. You can discount two-thirds of every telecast you see."

"All right, if you're sure . . . ."

Thirty-six hours later, Fred and Iris Jenkins stepped out of the beam receiving chamber at Lake Smyth, Venus.

Greeting their eyes was a foggy green world of immense volcanic mountains and vast rolling seas, matted with floating weed islands, that stretched to the horizon's edge from the rim of the plateau on which stood the resort town of Smyth.

Overhead, a mile above the ground, darted green swallow-like creatures, one of the many forms of aerial life on the planet.

The high oxygen content of the atmosphere proved exhilarating to the new arrivals. Fred Jenkins filled up his lungs and said, "I'd forgotten how this climate stirs you up."

"I feel it, too," Iris whispered softly, at his side. "Let's not go sight-seeing the first night. Let's just—"

A heavily-tanned official of the port, his military uniform half-buttoned, broke in on them at that moment.

He glanced at a sheaf of papers he held. "Are you Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins?"

"Something the matter?"

"Plenty. You shouldn't be here, at all. You were supposed to be re-routed to Lake Heisenberg. In about ten min-

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utes, this resort's going to be the hot spot of a damned serious war."

"Then, there is a rebellion?" Iris put in.

"In progress, madam," the official replied, fastening the remainder of his blouse buttons. "We'll get you re-transmitted soon as we can. But right now, we'd better take cover."

"It looks so peaceful . . . ." Fred Jenkins commented.

AS IF to hand the lie to his words, the darting swallows assembled into a V-shaped formation and plummeted from the sky. As they dived closer, the metallic luster of their greenish bodies became clearly visible. Suddenly, the creatures' rigid heads spurted flame.

"Guided robots!" Fred cried.

The official broke away from their side and ran towards a tunnel-like opening at the lake shore.

Fiery bullets chattered across the field, plowing a furrow of destruction through a group of buildings to their right.

Fred and Iris plunged across the plateau, close on the heels of the fleeing official. But they had hardly reached the mid-way point to the shelter, when Fred felt Iris' hand slip from his grasp. She pitched, half-fainting, to the ground.

"I've turned my ankle," she moaned. "Go on, darling. You can make it."

"No, we'll both get there." Fred stooped to pick her up, then stumbled forward, holding her weight in both his arms. Iris flung her wrists about his neck in support. "It's only a little farther," Fred told her.

The air was rent with the din of explosions everywhere. Heavy smoke billowed forth from burning structures. Screams of dying humans added to the confusion.

But the cave-like opening of the tunnel was almost at hand.

"Set me down," said Iris. "I believe I can hobble, now."

A few feet past the cave's entrance, they could see the official who had fled and other refugees, all gesturing and offering encouragement.

"A few more steps," said Iris, "and we're safe." [*Turn page*]

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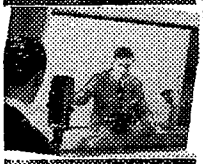

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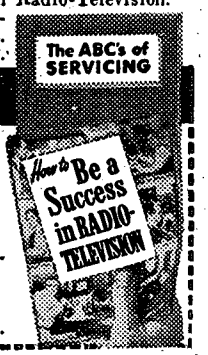

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"I'm winded," Fred groaned. Every muscle in his body ached in spent agony.

A long descending scream suddenly whistled through the atmosphere, high above them. "Look out!" shouted Iris.

Fred pushed her ahead of him, saw her tumble into the safety of the tunnel. In the next blinding moment, the missile struck.

GOOD morning, Mr. Jenkins," said the white-smocked young man in front of him. "I've been detailed to indoctrinate you."

"Indoctrinate me? About what?"

"Several things. Brace yourself for a shock, sir."

"I don't understand. Isn't this lake Smyth on Venus? I just stepped into a matter transmitter, operating from Earth. Where's my wife?"

"One question at a time, please," the young man said. "About that beam trip to Lake Smyth, I'm afraid you made that several days ago. You see, Mr. Jenkins, you're not the same Mr. Jenkins who actually did make that trip. That Fred Jenkins is dead. He was killed in a rebel raid shortly after arrival."

"Then I—?" Jenkins' senses began to reel.

"—you are a duplicate, yes. We re-created you from the most recent matrix on file. You have suffered very little loss of memory. Actually, you are only missing recollection of those events which caused your death."

"But, I'm real. I couldn't be dead. Look here, I'm just as alive as you are."

"Of course you are," the young man smiled.

"But—but I always thought a person re-created would lose his soul?"

"That's still a touchy point. You, Mr. Jenkins, may be able to help clear us up on that matter, sometime—if you'd be so willing."

"What is this place?"

"The beam station at Lake Heisenberg. If you still don't believe me, I'd be quite happy to show you your old body. It's rather mangled, but still recognizable."

"I've got to know for sure," said Fred. "If this is a joke—"

He followed the young man to the far end of the room, where a flowered casket rested on metal supports. The lid was shoved back.

The palms of his hands crawling with sweat, Fred bent over and gazed at the form inside. Suddenly, he felt sick—violently sick to the remotest cell of his body.

Summoning all his strength, he stood erect. "I'm still me," he announced. "Whatever has happened, I'm still *me*."

"Is there anything more I can do for you?" his attendant asked.

"No, thank you. Where's Iris, my wife?"

"Outside, I believe. Waiting for you—"

Fred Jenkins emitted a vigorous whoop, rushed through the pair of swinging doors indicated, and found himself at the head of a long corridor. His vision quickly swung to a tired huddled figure, seated on a nearby bench—Iris, her golden curls in disarray, but faithful and waiting. "Darling, you know, don't you?" he said.

"Yes," she nodded, as her slim form met his embrace.

He pressed her tight. "I've been mistaken about a planet-ful of things. Now, I'm beginning to get wise. Will you forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive," she said, between smiling tears. "Let's just enjoy and make use of the extra life we've both been granted."

"Every minute of it."

"Whenever you want to go back to Luna—" Iris' eyes glanced shyly towards the floor, "—I'm ready, Fred."

"Great. But, we've still got a second honeymoon to spend. I've a hunch it'll take us a long time."

"Wouldn't be surprised at all," Iris affirmed. And this time the shyness could be seen slowly departing from her unflinching blue eyes.

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It started with Martian perfume . . . but it turned into a stinking mess!

The Unreliable Perfumist

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

DUSK had come down, thin, blue and bitter cold, over the Martian desert; but under Marsport dome ten thousand bobbing lights mocked the evening, and the air was thick and warm. From end to end of Ares Avenue the little abrotanon-cars swirled in corruscating clusters before pleasure spots, danced up and down or floated motionless. And every car that flitted past left behind it a trail of fabulous Martian perfume.

A luxury capital, a pleasure city par excellence, Dirk Innes thought as he

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watched the abrotanon-cars circling. There was nothing like this on Terra. Beside the pageant of Marsport at night, anything on his home planet seemed provincial and crude. He was glad he'd tossed up his job and come, glad he'd been hot-headed and imprudent. It was worth while. The perfumes alone. . . .

No wonder they called Marsport "the city of perfumes," or, quoting Chou Kleor, the long-dead poet of the red planet, spoke of "scented Mars." The scents in the air were smooth and heavy and sweet, bitter and passionate, cool and withdrawn as the smooth petals of pink peronia petals against the lips. There was musk and ambrette, the sharp ecstasy of klleis buds. There were perfumes in the air, Dirk knew, that would come back to him hauntingly, as a strain of music troubles the mind; there were scents which seemed able to create, by themselves, a whole fantastic world.

Meantime, he ought to leave Ares Avenue and go around the corner to register at the Labor Exchange. He squared his shoulders and sighed. The trip from Terra had left him only a few dollars, but there would be no difficulty about getting something to do: the system was always short-handed.

It was going to be hard to be sensible. Cold-blooded calculation had never been Dirk's long suit. The sweet-scented dusk ought to have something better for him than filling out a meter-long application and standing for a vibragraph. The swarm of abrotanon-cars danced past him; and every one of them, Dirk felt, held the promise of some heady, dangerous encounter, some situation, delightful and ambiguous, outside the ordinary pale. Marsport, tonight, seemed the very pattern of adventure and romance.

It might have been an hour later when Dirk, regretful, turned to go. Traffic was lighter and he was hungry; it would have to be the labor exchange after all.

An abrotanon-car passed by him, paused, hovered, and returned. From the cushioned interior a woman—a Hartian, certainly, with the faint golden glow of the skin showing through her veil—leaned toward him and said in a rippling voice, "Get in, young man."

Adventure . . . romance. Dirk felt his heart thump pleasingly. A little unsteady from excitement, he got into the car and seated himself among the cushions near the unknown. The tiny chariot rose swiftly in the air, hesitated, then began to go quickly toward the east.

There was a silence. The lights of the city were below them now, and Dirk could make out his companion's face but dimly. She was beautiful, certainly, and her perfume was a unique marcel, a golden phoenix of a scent. It made him feel a little drunk. Once the lady turned her dark eyes toward his face, and he could have sworn she was laughing at him.

She would think he was a fool. He must do something, say something, break his boorish silence. She had, no doubt, thought him a man of the world, and now . . . .

With desperate resolution, Dirk slid toward her and slipped his arm around her waist.

FOR a moment the unknown endured the caress; then she pulled back from him and began to laugh, trill after trill of the most delightful mirth. Abashed, his ears growing hot, Dirk moved back to his former place.

"Young man," she said, still between peals of merriment, "I suppose you are not to blame for your mistake. Natural enough. However . . ."

She turned the fluor on in the car and at the same time threw back her veil. In the warm light Dirk saw the traces of crows' feet around the eyes, the light etching of parallels over the forehead, and realized that his lady, though beautiful still, must be on the edge of sixty years.

"Come, no sulks," she said in her golden voice. "I think none the worse of you for your display of enterprise. I hope that you will take dinner with me,

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and afterward . . . I may have something to say to you." She settled back.

Dirk nodded. He could have said nothing at the moment had his life depended on it. The car, which all this time had been going east, began to sink softly and came to rest on the roof of a mansion.

"We are at the very edge of Marsport," his companion said as she opened the door, "and high up, as you can see. I like to have the city at my feet. . . ."

They began to float gently down the shaft of the mini-grav.

They dined on golden trout from Lake Denon, on breast of marsh-hen baked under vacuum bells with scarlet polypore and asparagus, and on a salad of young akkar shoots (imported from Aphrodition, his hostess said) dressed with twenty subtle Martian condiments. With every dish the robot servant—not humanoid, like those on Terra, but a sort of pyramid with five flexible arms—offered the complement of dreamy, stormy-hearted Martian wine. There could be no question, Dirk reflected, but that the cookery of the red planet deserved its fame as much as did its art of perfume. He said as much to his hostess.

"Ah?" she replied. "—the strawberries, by the way, are for you. I think them the finest of your Terra's fruits, but I no longer care for sweets."

Then she sat silent, seeming to think, until Dirk started to light a cigarillo. "Mah ton!" she said, taking it from his hand. "Not here! Why, I should be unable to work for days. Young man, do you know who I am?"

The wine had oiled Dirk's rusty tongue. "A lovely woman," he said.

She threw back her head and laughed, and her throat was as firm as a young girl's. "You are a rascal! I knew that when I picked you up. Young man, my name is Alexandra Kordenay, and I am head perfumist for the Marsport prefecture. No doubt you have heard of me."

Dirk had not, but he nodded. Head perfumist—perfectly reasonable.

"In other words," Mme. Kordenay went on, "I am an artist, a creator, and as such am in need of leisure and quiet to create. All I have asked of life is that creative quiet. Yet, through no fault of my own, I have been embroiled in disturbances and dissensions enough to have broken a stronger spirit than mine.

"The ingratitude, the back-biting, the selfishness which I have met in my life would fill volumes. From my husband, from my child, from my fellow-workers—that ingratitude which, as one of your earth poets says, is sharper than a serpent's tooth. Sometimes I wonder how I have stood it all."

"Bad thing, ingratitude," Dirk said gravely.

For a moment Alexandra Kordenay's wonderful dark eyes flashed. "You are insolent!"

"Oh, no," Dirk replied, shocked. No. Certainly not. Meant no harm—ingratitude *is* a bad thing."

MME. KORDENAY'S frown slowly diminished. She looked at Dirk thoughtfully. The wine, no doubt," she observed. "Well, I spoke of ingratitude. In personal relations I have endured it somehow; but in my life as an artist I cannot tolerate, I cannot connive at ingratitude and dishonesty.

"Among us-perfumists there is an old tradition, a usage having almost the force of law, which dictates equal access to perfume sources and materials. Even our formulae are generally not kept secret for more than two years.

"Judge, therefore, my chagrin when I discovered last month that the head perfumist of Babrantion—it's in the South Canal district—had managed, somehow, to monopolize the entire supply of alaphronine and was refusing to give me a single c.c. with which to experiment. (I shall be betraying no secrets in telling you that alaphronine is a fixative which is just coming into use in perfumery and which seems likely to change our whole conception of the nature of scent. Its possibilities appear

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to be endless.)

"I humbled myself. I wrote to the perfumist in the most conciliatory terms, asking for some alaphronine. As I might have expected from such an upstart, a person completely lacking in the artistic temperament, I received no answer. I was wounded to the heart!"

Mme. Kordenay was looking both pathetic and heroic. Dirk wanted to reach out and pat her hand, but it seemed like a lot of work just now. He compromised on clicking his tongue in commiseration.

"I decided," the perfumist went on, playing with the stem of her wineglass while the jewels at her fingers and wrists flashed out colored fire, "that I must look about for a champion, someone who would help me right this injury. Tonight, when I saw you standing on Ares Avenue, I knew that I had found my man. I feel sure that I am not mistaken in you."

A certain amount of caution stirred in Dirk's mind. Mme. Kordenay was certainly womanhood at its most alluring, but something seemed to hint that she was also womanhood at its most reliable. "Um-hum," he said.

"Oh, I knew I could depend on you," Mme. Kordenay cried delightedly. "Now what I want you to do for me is to go to Babrantion, get some of the alaphronine, and bring it back to me. It's quite simple, really. I have a little 'copter you may use."

"Wha—but—"

"I knew when I saw you that you were a daredevil, a man who enjoyed risks," she went on quickly. "I am never mistaken in a man."

This somewhat flattering characterization had an element of truth in it. Dirk could only mumble and nod his head.

Mme. Kordenay went over to a book chest and came back with a large stereo map. Here's Babrantion," she said, pointing. "Near the south polar cap. And right here is the head perfumist's house. Do you see this marsh along the west side? They've got a force field all around the place except just there, so you'll have to land the 'copter on one of the solid spots and go in through the swamp.

"I'm afraid it won't be very pleasant, but it can't be helped. The mud has a perfectly dreadful smell, and there are leeches. Those are merely temporary discomforts, but there is a venomous little snake in the swamp which you really must be careful about. If you see a sort of whirring under the surface of the mud, get back. Don't take chances with them.

"Now, there won't be any trouble getting inside the house once you're up to it. They depend on the force field to keep intruders out. Here's a map of the house." She produced a little sketch and clipped it onto the top of the stereo map. "This is the laboratory. The alaphronine will be in it, of course, and you won't have any trouble locating it, because of two properties it has. Despite its use in perfumery, it has a dreadful smell, like a decaying glue manufactory, and it has a definitely reddish phosphorescence in the dark."

Mme. Kordenay paused. Dirk had the impression that she was just a little embarrassed. "Alaphronine has been used by some people as a nerve stimulant—a drug, in fact—and the Martian government has made its possession, except by qualified people, illegal," she said rather quickly. "So you must be careful not to be stopped while you have it with you."

Dirk's grin was twisted. Venomous snakes and a touch of drug smuggling. Mme. Kordenay certainly wasn't modest in her demands. But she was an excellent psychologist. She *had* picked the right man to steal the alaphronine for her; wild horses would not have been able to hold him back. Despite her years and the general impression of untrustworthiness she gave, he thought she was the most attractive woman he had ever seen. "O. K." he said.

"You dear boy!" she responded, beaming at him. Quickly she leaned across the table and kissed him on the mouth. Dirk blinked. "What are you thinking of, you

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rascal?" she asked teasingly when she had settled back in her place.

He couldn't be in love with her; she was old enough to be his mother. But—" Just wishing you were twenty years younger or I were forty years older," Dirk replied.

Alexandra Kordenay laughed so delightedly that dimples appeared in her cheeks. "I can see that I have been too pessimistic about this generation," she observed at last. "When it produces young men like you, there is still hope. Now, about details. . . ."

AS HE struggled through the stinking yellow mud toward the perfumist's house at Babrantion, Dirk decided that Mme. Kordenay had been far from frank with him. She'd spoken of two kilometers of swamp, but he'd already come five at least, and the house was still distant. (A swamp on Mars was an anomaly anyhow; the water must come from the polar ice cap, and the warmth from some sort of vulcanism.) From what she'd said, he had visualized the mud as being ankle-deep, but it nearly reached his chest. And it was alive with snakes.

Just before he had left Mme. Kordenay's house in the 'copter, she'd told him, looking faintly maternal, to be *careful;* there was no known antidote to their bite. Well, he was doing his best. The mud in front of him whirred ominously, and Dirk floundered hastily to the right.

Whenever he hoisted a portion of himself above the mud, it was festooned with brownish leeches clinging to the surface of his impervi-suit, looking for a place to start sucking his blood. He'd already pulled two or three away from the weak spots of his suit. Adventure . . . h'm.

He made the terrace of the perfumist's house at last. There had been nearly half a kilometer of well-kept garden between the edge of the swamp and the house, but Dirk was still so plastered with mud that he stopped to scrape as much of the stuff from himself as he could before slipping the lumisurd louver out of its frame and entering the house. The light was still thin and grey; it would have been impossible to cross the swamp at night, and Mme. Kordenay had told him over and over that no one in the perfumist's household would be up until late in the day.

According to the map, the laboratory should be to the right of the room Dirk had entered by. He padded down the corridor, noting absently that the lumigraphs on the walls were originals and showed the perfumist to be a chap with excellent taste, until he came to the door. Mme. Kordenay had told him that if it was locked he'd have to go up to the second floor and let himself down to the laboratory windows. Fortunately, it was unlocked.

The laboratory was a room as big as a pharrar rink, the walls lined from ceiling to floor with bottles of essential oils and fixatives. A little stepladder on wheels stood by the side to help the perfumist get down whatever he might want.

Dirk looked over the bottles which had been left sitting out on the various working surfaces of the room. No alaphronine. He got the stepladder and began a systematic survey of the shelves.

Twenty minutes passed, and he hadn't found the alaphronine. He was beginning to get nervous when it occurred to him that, by now, the room was too light for the phosphorescence of the alaphronine to show up. Hastily he darkened the laboratory and was relieved, after his eyes had grown used to the dark, to find the alaphronine in a small bottle about two-thirds of the way down on the south wall of the room.

He pulled out the stopper to make sure. Dead fish, rotting flesh, manure in the sun—how could they use stuff like this in perfumery? Anyhow, he had indubitably found what he was after. He shoved the stopper in solidly and began looking about for something to carry the bottle in. It—

"Mama sent you, I suppose," a voice behind him said.

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DIRK spun about. A girl, dark-haired and stormy-eyed, was facing him. She was wearing night attire so transparent that he could have counted her pores had the light been a little better, and he saw, even at first glance, that she markedly resembled Mme. Kordenay.

"You came through the swamp, I suppose," she went on. "Yes, there's one of those disgusting leeches on your elbow. You'd better pull it off; their bites infect."

Mechanically Dirk obeyed. "What—" he said.

"It was clever of her to think of sending you in by the swamp," she continued. "The chap before you smashed up his 'copter against the force field, trying to get in. I might have known mama would find another volunteer—even at her age, she has an effect like catnip on most males."

"I thought this was the head perfumist's house," Dirk said. He still felt dazed.

"It is. I'm the head perfumist—Lalage Kordenay. Why? Didn't she even tell you it was her daughter she was trying to rob?"

"No. I—" Dirk swallowed. He felt both defensive and confused. "She said you wouldn't let her have any alaphronine, and it was unethical."

"I wouldn't, and it is," Lalage agreed. "But I don't suppose she told you about what she did to me with the kaligenöol three years ago, did she? She let the other members of the perfumists' guild have small quantities, but I couldn't get even half a gram. I nearly drove the chemists crazy nagging them before they got it synthetized, and then it cost fifty-six times as much to produce as the natural oil did. I resolved then that I'd pay her back if I got the chance . . . I ought to turn you over to the police."

"Unh—" Dirk said.

"They'd probably send you to Pluto for life," Lalage said sadistically. "Alaphronine—its name means 'mind-maddening'—is just about the most dangerous drug in the pharmacopoeia. The courts always hand out the maxmium sentences in connection with it."

"Listen—" Dirk protested.

"She didn't tell you that either, did she? Oh, well. . . . let's have some light." Lalage pressed a button. In the increased illumination, Dirk could see that her figure was, so to speak, solid gold, and twenty-four carat at that.

For a moment she stood by the window, tapping her naked foot against the floor. "I tell you what I'll do," she said finally. "I'll let you have about two centimeters, with a warranty, pass, and so on, so you'll be in the clear legally, and you can take it back to her. On the whole, I've paid her back for that kaligenöol business—that letter she wrote asking for some alaphronine did my heart good—and I might as well be polite." She yawned. "This is hours before I usually get up," she said plaintively. "The smell of the alaphronine wakened me when you took the stopper out. How about having a cup of theo with me before you start back?"

". . . Fine. I mean, *fine*."

OVER the steaming beverage, never more welcome than in this early morning hour, Lalage confided to Dirk some of the difficulties and disappointments of a perfumist. She had, it seemed, been trying for the last eighteen months to get hold of a tuber, reputed to be found somewhere in the great Central desert, which one or two anthropologists said was used as a perfume and intoxicant by the scattered desert tribes. Since the tuber grew underground, it was difficult to locate, and there were some eight thousand square kilometers in which to look for it. What she really needed was a resourceful man, one who wasn't afraid of hardship, to look for it. If—

"You're centered, gesell," a voice behind Dirk said. It was a high, mean voice, with a chuckle in it somewhere. Dirk felt a tiny cold circle at the back of his neck. "You and the wheena both."

"What do you want?" Lalage asked

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sharply. She did not sound especially afraid.

"Oh, that." The unknown snickered. "The groot. The meema. The—what you call it—alaphro stuff."

"It's on the table in front of us," Lalage replied.

"Thanks. Don't move—I got two sliver guns, and you're centered to hell. Ever see a guy shot by a sliver gun? Sure is fun to watch." The unknown appeared in front of them, sidling delicately, his eyes fixed on their faces. His skin was deeply fretted and yellowish, his eyes inhumanly blank.

"Ah," he exclaimed, picking up the alaphronine with his left hand, still covering them with the sliver guns. "Groot. Good old groot." He drew out the stopper, inhaled with evident enjoyment, and then touched the stopper lightly to the tip of his tongue. He set the bottle down and shivered, transfixed with delight.

Dirk did not hesitate. Lalage had said alaphronine was the most dangerous drug in the pharmacopoeia, and the man had two sliver guns. Dirk threw the pot full of scalding theo at him and then tackled him around the legs.

The man staggered under the impact, but did not fall. There were two soft whooshes as the guns discharged into the carpet. Dirk clutched the stranger to him desperately and applied pressure scientifically to the proper spot on the man's right forearm. The man grunted and ground his teeth, but it seemed a long time before he let the sliver gun drop; Dirk realized that the alaphronine was acting as an insulator on his nerves. And he still had one sliver gun.

They struggled furiously for a moment and then the gunman broke away from Dirk. Saliva was running from the corner of his mouth, and he was shaking with gusts of private merriment. He raised the sliver gun.

Dirk dove for him again. Thank God, he thought, my reflexes are 5.23% quicker than average. That ought to bring me up about even with this lunatic. If I can get hold of him once more, I'll try to break his spine. No matter what that drug has done to him, it won't keep his spine from breaking when I bend him back.

The sliver gun was murmuring softly beside his right ear. The magazine held about two hundred darts. If one of them—

Dirk began to bend the gunman backward.

The body in his arms grew bonelessly limp, then contracted in a severe tonic spasm. Grimly, Dirk held on.

"I think you might as well let him go," Lalage said in his ear. "I shot him with that little gun, the one you made him drop. Is he dead?"

The gunman had gone limp once more. "No," Dirk answered, "even if you hit him in a vital spot, he'll go on like that for an hour or two, alternating tetany and going limp. Those sliver guns are nasty things."

"It was in the back of the hand," Lalage said, looking at the silently writhing man. His lips were drawn back from his teeth, and the whites showed around his eyes.

"Then he'll live. We'd better tie him up."

DIRK was about half-way through the process of trussing up the man when he heard footsteps on the terrace outside. He turned, picking up one of the sliver guns. There was a polite, deprecating cough.

"Why, it's dad!" Lalage exclaimed excitedly. She opened the big helioplex shutter wide. "Come on in. What are you doing here, snorkie?"

Edward Kordenay was dripping yellowly with mud from the swamp, and there were leeches all around the clasps of his shoes, but he had dignity.

"Well, you see I . . . why, that's Willie you've got tied up, isn't it? No wonder he didn't come back to where I was waiting! And who's this strange young man, Lalage?"

"Mama sent him to steal the alaphro-

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nine," Lalage replied, "and he's promised to go to the Central desert to hunt those kmna tubers for me." She paused and looked at her father sharply. "Did *you* send that meema taster here? He had two sliver guns. What were you up to?"

Edward Kordenay looked faintly ashamed. "I suppose you mean Willie," he replied. "Yes, I'm afraid I did. I didn't realize he took drugs, of course. Why? Did he bother you?"

"Well, a little," Lalage answered. "Don't tell me you were after the alaphronine too."

Mr. Kordenay sighed. "You know how your mother's temper is, dear," he said. "I've been, so to speak, sleeping out in the hexapod house for the last three months. I thought I might be able to conciliate her if I had some alaphronine."

"Why, dad, all you had to do was to ask me for it! You know I'd do anything for you."

"Yes, dear, but how would that have helped? If your mother had thought we were cooperating to placate her, she'd have been angrier than before. I had to steal the stuff." He sneezed.

"You'll take cold in those wet things," Lalage said. "You go upstairs and find something dry to put on, and I'll make more theo for all of us. And then we'll call the hospital and have them take Willie away. I understand alaphronine addiction can be cured."

The gunman was securely tied up by now. Dirk looked over to where Lalage was silhouetted against the light from the window.

"Your daughter, sir," he said to Edward Kordenay, "is a remarkably beautiful woman, even though I didn't realize I'd promised to get those tubers for her. By the way, my name's Dirk Innes."

"How do you do," Kordenay replied politely. "Yes, she takes after her mother in more ways than one." He looked down at Dirk, still on his knees, with a faint smile. "Young man," he said, "I don't know exactly what the future—or, more accurately, Lalage—has in store for you, but I've lived with her mother for almost thirty years. On the whole, I've enjoyed it. Women like her take a good deal of handling, but they can be exceptionally rewarding. I don't know exactly what Lalage will do after you get the tubers for her. But I think you're going to enjoy it."

Look Forward to Next Issue's Featured Novelets!

●

THE DIPLOIDS

The strange tale of a man who found out that he was either a freak . . . or just not human!

By KATHERINE MacLEAN

and

TURNCOAT

A lively satire in which competition between two great department stores leads to a ridiculous extreme. . . .

By DAMON KNIGHT

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The pilgrims had reached a dead end in space

Star of Wonder

by Julian May

FIRST COMMANDER HONDRA was accustomed to doing his thinking in his model shop. He sat there alone in the midst of a little cave of light, carved by the workbench lamp from the blue shadows of the ship's artificial night. There would be ten blue hours and ten bright hours—exactly as it had been on their home world of Eiollyra—in all the fifteen hundred and seventy-six ships which carried the population of the little planet through space.

It was the sleeping time. The First Commander had prayed that the people would sleep. He knew that they would not, just as he would not.

He arranged his tools on the table. Completed models gleamed on the shelves of the room around him. There was a slim, silver miniature of his flagship, and an exquisite jet sphere dusted with microscopic diamonds which were

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the constellations seen from home. There were miniature Eiollyran animals made from metal and mineral, worked cleverly to simulate scales and pelts. A platinum and crystal girl-child sat beneath a tree of which every leaf was distinct, although the whole thing was scarcely as tall as the First Commander's hand. There were engines and dancers and chronometers and music boxes, fashioned by his thin, hard fingers as he worked through the blue, sleepless hours.

Two unfinished models stood on a side shelf: one a spun-silica mock-up of a radio telescope, the other a little planetary globe which had been pushed back inconspicuously into the corner.

He took the globe down and set it on the table before him. It had been begun in the early days of the voyage, seven subjective years past in time and one hundred and ninety light years back in space, to compensate the first bitter pain of loss. It was made of green chromastite, with the refraction planes of the mineral subtly altered to simulate the varying depths of the sea. An overlay of rich, brown jade had been partially carved into a relief of continents and islands. It was to have been his masterpiece—a tiny model of Eiollyra.

He turned the globe slowly in his hands. The north continent was still blank and the poles wanted frosting. There was a lot of work to be done—delicate, painstaking carving with an energy needle—before it would be a perfect replica of the real world, the first world, the world whose warming sun, the astrophysicists said, would explode into a nova. *Oh Dawn, sun of justice, come and enlighten them sitting in darkness. . . .*

The First Commander slowly set up the magnifier and arranged the three-dimensional patterns. He pulled a transparent shield over his eyes and began to carve a tiny mountain chain.

A chronometer gave a soft, heterodyned tone and said, "Twenty-hour" in a low, musical voice. The face of Renoldine, the Second Fleet Officer, appeared on the communicator screen.

"Renoldine submitting to the First Commander."

"Hondra retaining."

"We have the new star-plates from *Astronomy-1*. You asked me to notify you."

The First Commander sighed and put aside the energy needle. "Call the Executive Chairman. Alert Astrogation. I'll be down at once. Hondra releasing."

The screen darkened and the First Commander rose to go. He considered putting the globe away and dismantling the magnifier, then he shrugged and let it be. It was time he finished it, after all.

THEY stood in the gallery high above the main deck of the flagship. Below them, in orderly ranks filing away into the distance, were fifteen hundred and seventy-six unit controls, each of which broadcast and received astrogation data from a single ship of the fleet.

The First Commander addressed the small group of officers, "Gentlemen, I'd like you to consider this star system, which is one of three sent by *Astronomy-1* as prospects for our next exploration."

He pressed a stud and a blur of bright points sprang onto the viewer screen. He adjusted the limitator to block out all stars more than ten light years distant, and abruptly the confusing background cloud vanished, leaving a perfectly blank field with a solitary binary system in the middle of it.

"What do you think of this system?" he asked the Third Astrogation Officer.

The young man looked gravely at the screen and at the referent data. He knew the old man was baiting him, but he burst out confidently:

"Blue-whites the size of the primary have been found to possess only a few planets—extremely large, located far from the sun, and unsuitable for human habitation. The secondary is a white dwarf star. Any planet close enough to

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be warmed to a livable temperature would be torn to pieces by gravity tides. I'd say this system would be a very poor risk, sir."

The First Commander grunted noncommittally and flashed the second plate. It showed a quadruple system consisting of a red, two whites and a green star. The referent placed it at a distance of nine light years.

The Executive Chairman, representing the population, observed glumly that multiple systems explored prior to this had usually proved to be barren of planets.

"How about this one, then?" The last plate came on the screen. In its center was a single yellow star.

"A type 13-H," said the Third Astrogator softly. "Like the home star—like Eiollyra's sun."

"I vote for this star," said the Executive Chairman promptly.

The rest of the officers concurred. Hondra said, "It is agreed then. Set the course."

Renoldine began to feed the co-ordinates into the master control, and a deep, almost subsonic hum swelled in the huge room as vectors and constants were translated by the receiver banks beneath the deck and sent into the unit controls for individual course correction. Hondra peered into the eyepiece of the confirmer and saw the star centered correctly in a complexity of deviation webs.

"It *does* look like Eiollyra," he marveled. And how many times he had sighted the home sun in the same way, pin-pointing her welcoming gold which stood out in the void of inhospitable stars. Suddenly an unreasoning anger rose in his heart. They had said it would become a nova. They had said that seven years ago, when the fleet abandoned their world forever. But the star was still there! It had not blown up!

But Eiollyra was not gone. Perhaps the astrophysicists had been wrong, and she would not be gone for another hundred thousand years. . . .

"All banks clear, unit controls ready for elision," said the Third Astrogator.

Hondra said out loud, "Through the confirmer, this sun bears an especially striking resemblance to Eiollyra. Wouldn't you say so?" He stepped aside from the instrument and motioned for the young man to look.

"I'd like to say so, sir—but I've never seen our sun through a course confirmer. I never aimed for her. Only away from her."

"Ah, of course," said the First Commander simply. "Then you wouldn't know, would you."

He turned away and repeated, "You wouldn't know at all." Then he threw the switch to take them into the blankness of hyperspace.

HONDRA'S wife had not slept either. She sat up in the twilight-blue shadows of the salon and watched the scope. She had tuned in the outside and watched the motionless stars, and saw pictures looking at her out of the light-splashed night until it faded to luminous grey nothingness. She had continued to stare even then.

Her husband had come back at last and found her, tears falling quietly from her unblinking eyes. He sat down beside her and took her hand. Her eyes did not leave the featureless screen.

"Dear, you mustn't cry. Is it because of the child again?"

Her gaze remained fixed, and when she finally spoke, the words came slowly and tiredly.

"Not only the child. It was good, I think, that he was not born alive. The poor little thing—there was nothing for him here."

"Nothing but hope," said Hondra gently.

"No," she said. "No more. It used to be here. But no more." The tears fell faster. "When we set out, it was an adventure. We left our world and our sun and the dear, familiar things behind, but they said there would be a new world soon. I've waited—I've tried

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to be patient."

He turned off the screen and wiped her streaming eyes. "It *was* the child. My dear. I'm sorry. But this weeping will make you ill again."

"If we would only stop somewhere," she pleaded. "Just for a year or two. We could go on again! We wouldn't have to stay. But just to feel the wind again, and the ground under our feet!"

"It's no use, my dear," he said, drawing her close to him. "None of the worlds we've visited could support human life."

She pushed him away from her and cried: "There was Gostand B! It was perfect! There were even trees and animals and—everything." Her sinking head curtained her breast with dark hair. "Why did we have to go away?" she sobbed. "They've been talking about it. Everybody. They say we should have stayed. Oh, Karei—why did we have to go away?"

"I've tried to tell you," he said patiently, taking both her hands. "The planet was a paradise—except for one thing. It was the sun, dear. Do you remember it? That strange, pearly-green sun that you liked so well. It made the little planet a death-trap. There was radiation from it which would have sterilized our whole race within two generations."

"But it was so beautiful! I saw the flowers on the scope. And there was a valley with a river where we could have—"

"It was a beautiful tomb for the race."

"I don't care about the race! All I care about is us! I'll die in space!" She threw herself against him and wept wildly. "Don't let them bury me in space, Karei. Not out here—" Her head, Hondra felt, was burning hot.

"Promise me this, Karei. I don't care if the atmosphere is chlorine and the rocks are lead. Bury me in the ground!"

"Stop it," Hondra commanded. "You're ill again. You must let me take you in to bed."

"I can't go on this way! And there are others who won't either. You'll see! We'll go back to Gostand and live our lives and die. And God help the race!"

"Come to bed," he persisted. "It will all pass away."

"Sooner than you think," she said, and ran sobbing out of the salon.

He sat down on the lounge before the darkened scope. *Oh Ruler of Aliens and desired of them, you cornerstone that makes all one, come and deliver man whom you did make out of the dust of the land. . . .*

A wall communicator sounded. Hondra rose and punched the retaining button. "Well?"

It was Renoldine. His face was ashen. "I'm sorry, Commander, but a grave situation has arisen. We have lost contact with *Communications-2*. No signal seems to be getting through to her." He paused, and his eyes flickered nervously for an instant. "*Communications-2* has facilities for broadcasting simultaneously to every ship in the fleet. I'm afraid that the rebellion you anticipated has begun at last."

Hondra said sharply, "Put this phone on a hyperspace band and give me a fix on *Communications-2*. She can't alter her relative position while we're in elision. And neither," he added grimly, "can we."

"Bandswitch completed, Commander. You may proceed."

Hondra sent out a call, identifying himself. For a full minute there was no answer. Then suddenly the screen burst out in a characteristic kaleidoscope tangle of colors and a voice said distinctly:

"This is Shendy, Astrophysicist Blue-Three. We have seized this vessel in order that on the day next, at six-hour, we may freely broadcast a message which is vitally important to every one of the exiled people of Eiollyra. I have checked the previous calculations of the scientists who told us our sun would become a nova. The calculations, First Commander, were wrong."

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SHORTLY before six-hour, the fleet of Eiollyra left hyperspace and came to rest outside a nine-planet system lit by a single yellow sun. No attempt at exploration was made. The people of Eiollyra were waiting for something else.

Hondra stood before the giant screen which took up an entire wall of the flagship's executive assembly room. Renoldine and Mocalis, chief in charge of astrophysics, were with him.

"I tell you, Commander, the notion is preposterous," Mocalis said. "Do you think we would have allowed the exodus to be organized if there was one shred of hope that Eiollyra might be saved? The shifts in the absorption bands alone were proof that. . . ."

His voice trailed off as the six-hour tone echoed through the little room. The screen changed from neutral grey to deep black. And then there was a sound of voices swelling and falling rhythmically, voices chanting two syllables which were meaningless, taken by themselves.

"They're broadcasting a pickup from one of the cityship assemblies," cried Renoldine.

"What *is* that sound?" Mocalis wanted to know. The chant, pounding and insistent, grew louder. Two words with a rising inflection on the second syllable, shouted by forty thousand human throats.

The First Commander said, "They have found out somehow the subject of Shendy's address." He looked suddenly at Renoldine and the astrophysicist. "That chant, gentlemen, is the most fearful sound ever to be uttered in the history of our misfated race." He turned away and faced the screen. "And soon it will be taken up by every man in every ship—a sound which has not been heard for five hundred years. The symbolic cry of grievance—of a people betrayed."

There appeared on the screen a dazzling point of light which expanded rapidly into a great white circle. It centered on a platform, and on a figure standing alone in the middle of it. The chant ceased.

The pickup lens swooped nearer to the figure, and the face of a man filled the screen. It was a gaunt and painful face, with dark eyes and a drawn, narrow mouth.

"We have traveled for seven subjective years," the speaker began without preamble. "We have searched for a new home among the stars because the scientists told us that our sun was doomed. Within a period of ten years, according to their calculations, our sun would explode into a nova, vaporizing the planets instantly. When we received these dreadful words, we accepted them with sorrow and courage. Since that day we have traversed nearly two hundred light years of space, trying to find a world to take the place of that lost to us.

"We have seen many strange suns, and the weird and inhuman planets circling them. Some of the planets have been inhabited, and some have been barren. But none of them were for us. We have seen methane worlds and sulfur worlds; worlds with atmospheres clouded by swirling plastics and worlds whose seas were acid; desert worlds, and worlds rank with sentient vegetation; dead worlds and worlds newly born.

"But never, in all the hundred of systems we have visited, has there been a world with familiar sky of blue-green, or emerald seas or purple hills or rich brown plains to compare with this world!"

ABRUPTLY the speaker's face vanished and another image took its place. Hondra and the other two men drew in their breaths sharply. The picture on the screen was a full-color stereo taken from space. Eiollyra hung there against the starry night, gorgeous and real once more.

"He must be mad!" Renoldine exclaimed.

"Clever," the First Commander corrected.

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"This is the only world," said Shendy. "The world on which we were born, for which we were made and no other. We have left it behind—why?—because they told us that their calculations showed it likely that the sun would become a nova!

"I was one of those scientists, people of Eiollyra. I was one of those who turned you away from your world and made you wanderers in space. We turned you away, people of Eiollyra, *for nothing!*

"I have been checking the equations, observing our sun even from this great distance. I have found that our original calculations were in error! Our world is not doomed. Our sun will not become a nova. We can return to our homes. Eiollyra is our own once more!"

Leaning forward swiftly to the control panel Hondra tuned in the assembly hall of the nearest cityship. It was in an uproar. The image of the home planet remained on its screen. Most of the people raised their arms toward it and wept, while others streamed up and over the seats in exultant frenzy.

"Ready on the cut-in from *Communications-1*," said Renoldine.

Hondra arose and took his place before the lens, and the picture of Eiollyra disappeared from the cityship's screen. His own image was broadcast in its place to each of the fifteen hundred and seventy-six ships.

"I request order," he thundered. *Oh God at our side, the expected of the worlds, come to save us.* "Choose your spokesmen," he said in a voice which had suddenly become ineffably weary. "We will follow the will of the people."

Back in her cabin, Hondra's wife swayed dizzily. "We're free, we're free," she crooned, stroking the glass of the communicator with trembling fingers. Her face congested with fever, she bobbed unsteadily before the blank screen. "I'll be here for a while—only a little while—and then I'll be home. Shendy says I'll be home."

"I can't get her back to her room," whispered the nurse desperately to Hondra. "She's been there ever since Shendy's broadcast. We can't frighten her. Can't you do something?"

He stepped into the salon and went slowly toward the weaving figure.

She stopped still at the sound of his step and her lips bloomed in an exquisite smile. "Karei! Have they told you yet, my darling? We'll be going back to Eiollyra. Shendy says so. And Shendy's right." She looked confidently at the space where she thought his face would be. "He is right, isn't he, my darling? Oh tell me he is!"

He picked her up in his arms, cradling her burning head on his shoulder.

"Of course," said the First Commander soothingly. "Of course Shendy's right."

Elsewhere the feeling was charged with defiance. "Shendy is wrong," said Mocalis flatly. Spokesmen from the cityships murmured angrily. The Executive Chairman raised his hands warningly and the murmur subsided. The astrophysicist went on:

"I cannot tell you the words you want to hear. I only wish I could. We have worked without stopping for two days, utilizing every facility of our three great astrophysics units rechecking the calculations. Shendy has made a tragic mistake. The relentless weight of scientific facts confirms the previous deductions. Eiollyra is doomed to inevitable destruction."

A stubborn, negative babel arose from the assemblage. "Give us the First Commander!" they shouted.

Hondra stepped forward and the lens sent his face to sixty-three million waiting people.

"As your First Commander, I must order whether we are to turn back to Eiollyra or continue on as before. But the decision is not mine to make, after all. Your will is the one which must make this choice. Each one of you, individually, must choose. A vote will be taken and ships turned over to those who wish to return."

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SHOUTS of approval greeted his words, but Hondra waited. "I will do this because as long as there is the smallest hope that our world will not be destroyed you have the right to pursue it.

"But I tell you this. Our fleet has been carefully compartmentalized—farm units, cityships, administrative and reasearch units. It is a living, functioning organism, operating under optimum efficiency and a delicate balance. I am convinced that dividing the fleet may well result in the destruction of us all." He bowed and withdrew. There was no sound.

Another man, drawn and dark-eyed, wearing a white uniform, leaped up and faced the lens.

"People of Eiollyra!" Shendy cried. "The First Commander seeks to undermine your confidence by vague insinuations. He asks you to continue this weary voyaging from planet to planet on the force of his opinion! This very moment our fleet rests in a star system two hundred light years from home. A system, incidentally, whose only oxygen-atmosphere planet supports poisonous green vegetation. We have come to another dead-end in space. Commander Hondra offers us only the prospect of an ever-lengthening trail of these useless worlds, leading nowhere but to ultimate despair."

He turned slightly and extended his arms toward the great screen behind the speaker's platform. "I ask you *all* to return with me! There need be no partition of the fleet. I offer not vain hope but concrete reality. I offer you—this!"

The screen lit up. Mocalis exclaimed, "The same trick all over again!"

"No," Hondra said. "This is different. Look!"

The image this time was no stereo photograph. It was a telescopic view, taken through the gigantic instrument which occupied most of the ship *Astronomy-3*. The limitator had been [illegible]sted, and Eiollyra's sun stood out clearly against a sparsely starred background.

"We *will* go back!" the people shouted hysterically.

Hondra inclined his head slightly to Shendy, who stood triumphant in the center of the platform. *Oh, Key, who opens and no man closes, who closes and no man opens, come and bring forth from his prison the captive who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death.*

"People of Eiollyra," Shendy began—but never finished. . . .

The tiny disk of Eiollyra's sun seemed to shrink. Then from its upper limb a slow, vast prominence spurted. When it reached its ultimate, leisurely extension, the small sun exploded.

One of the audience fainted. The others, too stunned to voice their shock, stood mutely and despairingly.

HONDRA turned off the energy needle and directed a gentle blast of air to remove the last particles of loose jade from the mountain ranges of his globe. Only the frosting of the poles was left now, and working with deft assurance, he sprayed on the suspension of diamond dust and fixative.

Finally it was done. He cradled it in the palm of his hand, letting the workbench light be a sun for the miniature brown continents and rich, green seas. After a moment, he put the globe in his tunic pocket.

The workroom door opened, and the music he had managed to shut out—the dirge for Eiollyra being broadcast from all the communicators—billowed in around him. He turned. The man who stood unmoving in the doorway wore a uniform which had once been white.

"The worst part of it," Shendy said, his words uneven in supressed hysteria, "is that they won't kill me."

"Come in," said the First Commander. "And shut that door."

"Well, don't *you* blame me? Won't anybody blame me? It's my fault—the rioting and the suicides and the despair—all of it!" He dropped into a chair.

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Hondra moved to a cabinet, took out a carved bottle, and decanted a glassful of heavy, silver-grey liquor. "Down," he directed, then turned his back and started to remove the protective shielding from the small, powerful telescope set in the outer hull.

"What's left now?" asked Shendy in a whisper. "No more hope of return. No more wish to go on. Nowhere in the universe a resting place for us. Do you know what they're saying? They want to go back to Gostand B!"

"Why not? If the fleet goes on, there may be years of traveling ahead before a planet is reached which can support human life such as ours. It could take a generation—or fifty. Or we might search the whole galaxy and find nothing."

"But Gostand means suicide for the race!"

"And continuing on? Perhaps a slower death by despair and rebellion." *Oh Wisdom coming from the mouth of the Most High, reaching to the ends of space and ordering all things mightily and sweetly, come and teach us the way of prudence!*

"It's only a leader they need—"

Hondra whirled and fixed him with a shriveling, contemptuous glance. "You would have led them back to Eiollyra. But then that was a direction they wanted to go, wasn't it! Do you have the courage to lead them where they *don't* want to go? Can you convince them that they should sacrifice themselves for the faint possibility that their children—or maybe their children's great-grandchildren—can live under an open sky again?"

Shendy said nothing.

"You can't do it?" asked the First Commander more gently. "Neither can I."

He bent over the eyepiece of the telescope and spent some time adjusting it.

Shendy rose and went toward the door. "Just a moment," said the First Commander. "I'd like you to look at something."

Reluctantly Shendy came to the telescope. In the field was a blue planet, strikingly beautiful. "The third planet of this system," Hondra explained.

"The vegetation is poison even though the air is good. A lovely, useless world."

"Nonetheless, I intend to visit her. Because useless though she may be, she is solid ground—and I must fulfill a promise I made."

"A promise?" said Shendy dully. "To whom?"

"To my wife," said the First Commander.

"I should like," said Shendy slowly, "to come with you."

"If you wish," said the First Commander.

THEY landed on the night side of the planet, in a hilly district near a great landlocked sea. Shendy stood apart from the First Commander when they had completed their task, muffled in a heavy cloak, shivering slightly in the cold. His hidden fingers tightened on the small vial he had brought with him from the flagship. Overhead, stars glittered brilliantly in the thin air, and brightest of all, hanging low over the hills and illuminating the landscape, was the nova of Eiollyra.

The two men moved together. "Such a chill, calm land," Hondra said, and his voice had a curious, almost frightening, lightness. You would think that the whole world was at peace."

"I would like to walk a bit, said Shendy. "Alone, if you don't mind."

His eyes met those of the First Commander, but Hondra said only, "I'll take the path into the valley."

"Good-bye," said Shendy, and disappeared into the darkness.

The First Commander turned and started down the faint trail, picking his way carefully through clumps of thorny shrubbery and stumbling occasionally against rocks hidden in the darkness. A faint clanking sound reach his ears, and now and then some animal far below gave a qua[illegible]

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He went slowly toward a light which was flickering in a cleft down the hill to his right, and finally stood on a cliff overlooking an eneven valley. Beneath him, a group of men stood around a large fire while a herd of bulky, short-legged animals milled restlessly about.

One of the men was shouting and waving his staff excitedly while the others listened and occasionally gave a incredulous guffaws. A boy ran up with a great armload of brush and dumped it into the fire, making it hiss and roar up to the sky with a cloud of sparks. Suddenly he yelled and pointed at the cloaked figure of the First Commander standing on the upper trail. The excited man saw him too, and came running up to meet him, shouting breathlessly.

Hondra shook his head sadly and turned out his palms in a gesture of non-comprehension. The man cocked his head, tossed a few words over his shoulder to his joking compatriots, and took Hondra by the arm, drawing him down toward the fire.

The rest of the group grunted a bluff welcome and looked at him without curiosity. The excited man resumed his tale. He clapped his hands over his eyes dramatically, staggered and recovered himself, and repeated one phrase over and over again. Finally he pointed up at the sky and swept his arm in the direction of the valley, where a few lights twinkled.

The nova? wondered the First Commander.

The man said a few more urgent words, pointing down the trail. The others laughed at him and tapped their foreheads significantly. A stocky, older man with an air of authority stepped forward and addressed the speech-maker peremptorily.

The latter shrugged and spoke with an attitude which obviously conveyed that the others would be missing a great opportunity if they did not accompany him into the valley, but the rest only shook their heads and snickered. At last the man called out to the boy who had tended the fire, and they began to round up the animals and drive them down the trail.

Hondra stepped up to the herder and laid his hand on the man's shoulder. With the other he pointed toward the lights. The man smiled and motioned for the First Commander to follow.

Near the town, they encountered other groups, shouting jubilantly. Some were driving their flocks ahead of them, while others came with implements the First Commander assumed to be weapons. Without exception they were rudely dressed in tanned scraps of hide with the fur still on it, and coarse, woven-fibre cloth. They pressed on urgently until they reached the outskirts of the town, then turned aside to follow a roughly-paved road lined with trees.

ABOVE, the nova had sunk low in the northwest over a wooded hillock, and it was in this direction that the herders went, their chatter becoming more restrained. They paused in a grove of trees near a well-lit building. A youth ran out of the courtyard and spoke to them, motioning them to follow him, and suddenly the First Commander found himself alone in the orchard with the deserted animals moving nervously around him.

He pushed among the rank-smelling bodies, feeling their sharp hooves gashing the gloss of his boots. "I must be out of my mind," he muttered bitterly to himself. "What are they but ignorant natives going about their insignificant affairs? They don't know who I am or what I am. A man from another star? They only know their single little island in space. The stars are merely ornaments to them."

Extricating himself from the animals at last, he went into the courtyard. At the rear of the main structure, built back against the hill, was a low, wooden outbuilding. The nova glittered above it, through a tangle of wiry branches. "Eiollyra's sun is a curiosity," he said. "Something to gape at for a minute,

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then forget." *As you have forgotten, Oh Unforgetting?*

A smoky, fitfully burning lamp hanging from a rafter illuminated the shed dimly. The First Commander hesitated, then went to the door and looked in.

The interior was crowded with men. Just inside the door stood two crop-headed stalwarts in metal-studded leather armor, holding brass helmets in their hands. They made room for him without a word.

The place seemed to be a shelter for animals. Wooden partitions divided the rear wall nito compartments, and the floor was strewn with dried grass. But there were no animals in the stalls now, and the place was clean. The herders were clustered around the farther stall, some on their knees and the rest standing back talking quietly among themselves. A boy, whom the First Commander recognized as the one who had tended the fire in the hills, was perched high on the rim of one of the partitions so that he could see over the heads of the others.

The First Commander moved closer until he could see into the stall. "Only a peasant woman and her child," he said sorrowfully to himself. But then, what had he expected?

One by one the herders approached the young woman, laying articles at her feet. There were wooden bowls, a bone-handled knife, a small carved box, a skin and other homely offerings. The mother was gracious even to the crudest of the men, who advanced awkwardly with a reed flute clutched in one hand. As he stopped to lay it on the ground, the new-born infant in the woman's arms opened its eyes and the crowd exclaimed in admiration.

There were bustling, officious noises at the door, and a stout woman, with her head bound in a kerchief and her arms full of soft robes, pushed forward into the stall. She scolded the boy sitting on the partition, and began to arrange the coverings gently around the mother and child. When she had finished, she spoke anxiously to the mother, who reassured her with a few words, whereupon she smiled and withdrew.

There remained only a few of the herders and the two soldiers at the door who had not yet made their offerings. The First Commander watched them approach and withdraw. Outside in the darkness a single voice began to sing softly, and he thought of other music which had followed him from the fleet—ponderous and slow-pulsing, making even his heart beat slower and wish to stop if only to make the music stop.

The mother looked up and saw him standing in the shadows, and soundlessly the crowd parted and made way for him. He threw his cloak back over his shoulders, not caring whether they saw his strange dress, and stepped forward into the light. His eyes held those of the woman and burnt with an emotion nearer grief than defiance.

"You can't understand me," he said. "You, with your new child sleeping on your breast and the gifts of your friends at your feet. You won't understand what I say to you, but I say it nevertheless . . . because I am only a fool who led a race of fools chasing a dream across the depths of space. When they had hope, I was their leader. Now that they have lost it, I am the one who should give them courage to go on. But I have no courage even for myself."

HE LOOKED around at the motionless, kneeling figures and felt fury rising. What need did they have for hope? They had their world! His hand closed on the globe which still rested in his pocket. He and his people would keep their world as well! They would keep their images of Eiollyra before them always in their last home on Gostand.

Eiollyra, the thought of her! How could he ever give up that thought and its comfort? The dirge which flowed through his brain grew stronger and stronger until he felt his skull would break with the surge and flood of

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Oh Root of Tradition, before whom the powers are dumb and to whom the aliens shall make supplication, come to deliver us!

The child stirred, and the mother's face seemed to fill with pity.

"How can you know?" Hondra cried. "How can any of you know what it is to lose the thing which is your light and life, and seek it through the years until all hope is gone? All my people asked for was hope. But there was none anywhere in the universe."

The mother said to him: "Hope is here new-born to those who have waited, as He was to your world, as He will be again to those who wait for Him. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God, the Mighty. And his empire shall be multiplied to the ends of space and there will be peace."

The First Commander sank down in astonishment and confusion, but after a time these ebbed slowly away, leaving his reason clean and alone. "I know you," he said.

OUT in space, the corridors of the city-ships were empty, and the music was growing slow and faint. And on the planet below, the nova had set in the western sky at last.

The First Commander lifted his head slowly, but the mother was no longer looking at him. The infant had awakened. . . .

Hondra rose to leave. But at the door he paused and turned. From the pocket of his tunic he took the small globe of Eiollyra and placed it at the edge of the heap of offerings. Then he turned his back on the stable and returned to his ship and the fleet, where the music grew dim and finally stopped. . . .

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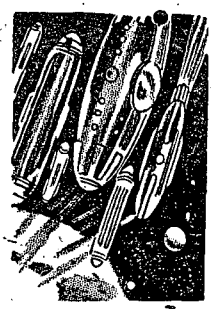

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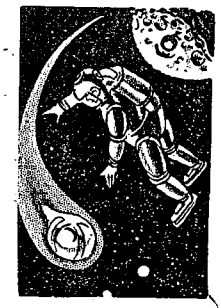

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There was a scream of terror and

Professor Laertes Solomon started out on a mission to a thievocracy and made mystery history by winding up as—

CHIEF THIEF!

PREAMBLE

The S. S. Terra, a League freighter of the A class, was two light years off Arcturus II. She was loaded with Martian yellowwood and Vegan textiles, and her vaults contained a shipment from the Interplanetary Diamond Trust.

Two slim black cruisers, their slender thrusting lines alien to the League space lanes, came sweeping up behind the freighter. Despite her steady speed of one parsec an hour, the cruisers overtook her in a matter of seconds. There were strange energy coils around the pointed nose of each cruiser, and the

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Assignment to ALDEBARAN

a novelet by KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN

pain as one of the Aldebarans fell

freighter's radar screen continued to prove there was nothing nearer than Arcturus II.

The cruisers came up under the belly of the freighter and magnetic plates clamped them to the big ship, one on each side of the air-lock. Two helmeted, suited figures emerged from the cruisers and clung to the freighter. One of them probed with an instrument and the outer door slid open. They stepped inside and closed it. When the pressure had adjusted, the same instrument opened the inner door. A handful of bright capsules were tossed through it.

After a time the big freighter slowed down and swung around until she was traveling in a great circle. Thirty minutes later the two figures reappeared. They closed the air-lock door and climbed back into their cruisers.

The S. S. Terra *circled aimlessly in space, only one short light year from her destination. . . .*

I

DR. LAERTES KWANG SOLOMON was in a foul humor. He tramped along the corridor of the 170th floor of

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the new Interplanetary Rest Hotel ("Overlooking Beautiful Saranac Lake") and grumbled to himself.

He was a big man, weighing well over two hundred pounds. His face was round and pinkly innocent. Bright, almost childish eyes peered at the world from beneath bushy brows. His gray hair was tousled and always needed trimming. Although everyone wore bright clothes, none were brighter, nor more ill-matched, than Dr. Solomon's. His coat was like a canary yellow tent. His slacks, baggy at the knees, were magenta. His shirt was a two-tone red. The overall effect was that of a rumpled rainbow.

During eight months of the year, Dr. Solomon was the head of the Department of Impossible Events—sometimes known as the If-History—at Solar University on Mars. His lectures on "What would have happened if the wheel had never been invented" and "What would have happened if Cleopatra had been frigid" as well as "What would have happened if Mars had gotten the space drive before Terra," were justly famous. During the remainder of each year, Dr. Solomon was in the habit of going to some relatively quiet resort hotel and pursuing his hobby. This year he had chosen the Interplanetary Rest Hotel, only to find himself in the midst of a political convention. And if there was any one thing which Laertes Solomon detested above all others, it was a political convention.

Having just escaped from the atmosphere of a convention luncheon, Dr. Solomon was busily outlining a future lecture as he strode along. The theme, he'd decided, would be "What would have happened if every single delegate to the first convention ever held had dropped dead of bubonic plague." The possibilities inherent in this theme had restored his good humor by the time he reached the door to his room. He pressed his hand against the palm-lock and entered.

The room was a model of chaos. Books, magazines, newspapers, manuscripts and scraps of paper bearing notes were piled high on chairs, dressers, bed, video set, and in odd spots all over the room. The automatic dusters had long since stripped their gears in the face of the impossible, and the Service Supervisor had refused to enter the room since the second day of his visit. Which was exactly the way Dr. Solomon liked it.

IN THE midst of this apparent confusion there was a large desk on which there stood a strange-looking contraption. Historians would have recognized it as a typewriter, but to the average citizen of the League it would have been a mystery. Laertes Solomon refused to have anything to do with the modern Cybernetic-Scribes and insisted on sitting in front of the old machine, personally attacking each letter as though it were a deadly enemy.

The ancient writing machine was of a piece with the doctor's hobby. The last crime in the Solar System—in fact, in any of the nine systems that made up the Galactic League of Planets—had been committed in 2231, more than five hundred years earlier. The Dwoskin Morality Rating Computor could spot the slightest tendency to deviation from the social norm and the treatment was always successful. With the end of crime, interest in crime literature rapidly waned. For four hundred years no one had read mystery stories and most people had even forgotten there had ever been such a form of literature. The one exception was Laertes Solomon.

His room was filled with books that were five hundred, or more, years old. Their bindings were cracked and curling, the leaves brown with age. If it hadn't been for modern preservatives, they would have crumbled to dust long before. The names of the authors—the once magic names of John Dickson Carr, Ellery Queen, Anthony Boucher, Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, M. E. Chaber, and many others—had long been forgotten by all but Dr. Solomon

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and two or three custodians of musty museums.

It had taken Laertes Solomon a lifetime, and most of his income, to collect the mystery-novels and crime stories in the room. He was especially proud of the fact that he had deftly borrowed one of the mystery novels from the Museum of Ancient Terran History. It was a definite accomplishment in an age when crime was guaranteed to be impossible.

As soon as he entered his room, Laertes seated himself in front of the writing machine and scowled at it. He was in the middle of preparing a monograph on *The Influence of Mystery Novels on the Sex Life of Ancient Terrans.* He had recently uncovered, while searching for lecture material, the microfilm of a 20th Century newspaper. It had contained the story of a man who divorced his wife because she read mystery novels in bed.

The monograph would connect the ancient news story with the drastic drop in the birth rate that had occurred around the beginning of the Twenty-first Century, in order to prove that the ancient Terrans had found mystery novels more exciting than procreative activity. Then it would suggest that the League Government revive mystery novels as an alternative to the monthly Sterility Board visits.

Laertes chuckled as he thought of the repercussions that would follow the appearance of his monograph.

He had pounded out only a few sentences when there was a purr from the announcer. He glared at the door for a full minute becore he decided to admit he was there.

"Come in," he growled. His voice activated the relays which simultaneously unlocked the door and issued an invitation for the visitor to enter.

The man who entered brought with him an air of authority. It wasn't only that he wore the severe white shirt which was the emblem of a League official; many a White Shirt failed to give an impression of power. This man, however, carried himself as one who was accustomed to being obeyed. It was in the expression of his well-pampered face, in the carriage of his amply-fed body.

He glanced around at the cluttered room, mingled curiosity and distaste on his face.

Laertes looked at his visitor with suspicion. There was something familiar about him, but it stopped short of recognition. Laertes cared little for visicasts and less for politicians.

"Well," growled Laertes, "did you want something, or did you merely drop around to admire the well-ordered beau-

Utopia Achieved!

IF MAN is an utterly selfish animal, his sole objection to murder would seem to lie in a personal aversion to being murdered. Yet things do not seem quite so black, for Man continues to dream of Utopia, where all evils including Crime are eliminated, so perhaps there is something of the ultimate good in Man's grubby little soul.

The theme which here engages the interest of our Mr. Crossen is the one of Utopia achieved. Crime has been eliminated. Does this then leave Mankind helpless if some atavistic criminal culture suddenly pops over the horizon? Will Man have lost his faculty for dealing ruthlessly with those who threaten him? Probably we don't have to worry about that for a long time. But in the realm of speculation, here it is.

—The Editor

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ty of my existence?"

The man's gaze left the cluttter and fixed on Laertes' face. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I wanted to see you. I presume you must be Dr. Solomon?"

"I am. Who are you?"

AN EXPRESSION of surprise was quickly masked. "I am Nicholas Samoti. I have the honor of being the President of the Galactic League of Planets."

"Honor," snorted Laertes. His suspicion deepened. The head of the Galactic League did not usually drop in on ordinary citizens; if he had something to say to them they were summoned into his presence. "What do you want?"

"As you probably know," the President said smoothly, "there is a political convention being held in this hotel. A meeting of the Solarist Party, of which I am the titular head. This explains my presence in the hotel. Hearing that one of our most distinguished citizens was also in the hotel, I took the liberty of calling upon you."

"Bosh," Laertes said. "You want something or you wouldn't be here. What is it?"

"May I sit down?" the President asked.

Laertes reluctantly removed the books from the chair beside his desk. "You're interrupting me," he said pointedly. Only his curiosity prompted him to be this civil. "I'll listen, but not to any of your jet-blown political speeches. Say what you've got to say and then get out."

"Man to man," the President agreed. He visibly restrained himself from dusting off the chair before sitting down. "I imagine that you are familiar with our present political situation?"

"I'm familiar with its stench," Laertes said. He gave the President a wolfish grin. "I know that the League was formed through conquest by the Solar System. I know that Rigil Kentaurus, Sirius, Procyon, Altair, Fomalhaut, Vega, Pollux and Arcturus are *privileged* to elect forty-nine per cent of the Galactic Congress, while Sol elects the remaining fifty-one per cent. I know that the Solarist Party has elected every president and dominated every congress since the formation of the League. I know that the business trusts of the Solar System own the Solarist Party—of which you have the *honor* of being the head—and that they finance the Universalist Party to furnish a token opposition."

"Crudely put," the President said amiably, "but essentially correct."

"You admit it then?"

"Just between the two of us—yes. But I think you might have mentioned some of the assets derived from our rule."

"I didn't know there were any," Laertes said.

"We have abolished crime."

"Crimes of individual against individual, or of individual against business—but not those of business against the individual."

The President smiled. "Since we define crime, those are perfectly legal. And since we have also provided a minimum security for every citizen of nine sun systems, I doubt if our actions could be called crimes under any definition."

"Minimum security in regard to food and shelter," Laertes said, "but none for personal freedom."

"The slogan of mountebanks," the President said. "We've had no crime in five hundred years; no war in four hundred years."

"I seem to recall," Laertes said sweetly, "that Sol declared war against Procyon two years ago. And wasn't it three years ago that we declared war against Pollux?"

"Declaration of war, yes," said the President, "but no war. In each case, peace was immediately negotiated through Congress."

"I remember," Laertes said dryly. "In each case, war was declared shortly after it was discovered the other system held valuable patents which they refused to sell to the Solarian Trusts. In

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each case, war was declared, our fleet of oxygen-bomb ships appeared over the planets of the system, and their patents were grabbed under the laws governing the state of war. By the time the peace was negotiated, our Trusts had examined the patents and, of course, there was no way of returning knowledge—although the patents were always returned."

"It was just good business. The point is, Dr. Solomon, that we're not a warring system. We have a fleet of O-bomb ships, but that is all. We have no light bombers and practically no fighting ships. We have not lived by war for four hundred years. As a result we are not prepared for war."

"You keep harping on this," Laertes said. He looked shrewdly at the President. "Does that mean someone is about to declare war against us?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes."

"Who?"

"I'm coming to that," President Samoti said smoothly. "You know about the Abrams Space Drive?"

Laertes nodded.

"Until it was built last year, our space flights were limited to approximately twenty light years. The League itself was developed through a series of such short hops. But with the Abrams Drive all of this was changed. We immediately began exploring beyond the borders of the League. Most of the inhabited planets we are discovering will, of course, be permitted to join the League."

"Decent of you," muttered Laertes.

THE President ignored his sarcasm. "One of the first systems we approached was the Aldebaran. Five planets in the orbit. The first two are too near their sun to support life. Planets four and five are inhabited by primitive forms of non-human intelligent life. The third planet is another matter. It possesses two dominant races, one human and the other non-human."

"They're resisting permission to join the League, eh?"

"Aldebaran Three," continued President Samoti, "has a criminal culture. They live by theft and fraud. We sent two observers to the planet. They hadn't been there five minutes before their pockets were picked clean. A handful of Aldebarans were starting to unbolt the ship engine, so they decided to return."

Laertes Solomon laughed until the tears ran down his face. The President waited patiently until the laughter faded to a rumbling chuckle.

"For a century the Aldebarans have raided other planets and practiced space piracy. Fortunately for us, they operated in the other end of the Galaxy. Until recently. Apparently they have turned their attention in this direction. They must have thoroughly scouted us, for they speak our language and seem familiar with our customs. Last week they struck for the first time."

"A raid?"

"On a League freighter bound for Arcturus. It was loaded with wood from the Building Trust—but it also carried a fortune in gems from the Diamond Trust. The Aldebarans entered the ship while it was in flight from the outside—which our engineers say is impossible. Before or after entering, they drugged the entire crew. They ignored the shipment of wood, but they took the diamonds from a vault. The vault is one which our engineers also swear cannot be opened except by the electronic key which has never left the possession of the Diamond Trust."

Laertes grunted with disdain. "I never saw a lock, electronic or not, that couldn't be opened," he said. "How do you know it was Aldebarans and not some of the crew?"

"The crew was Dwoskin rated immediately and the computor cleared them." If he saw the smile on Laertes' face, he ignored it. "The vault contained a camera which automatically photographed anyone opening the door. There were two Aldebarans involved. One human, one not."

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"If you're that positive," Laertes said sourly, "why tell me about it? Why haven't you just sent your bombing fleet over Aldebaran and demanded the return of the diamonds?"

"We have," President Samoti said dryly.

"Oh-ho," Laertes said. The interest in his eyes sharpened. "I gather they refused?"

"They did." The President's smile was bleak. "One of our largest space bombers was over the planet. The commander warned the Aldebarans that unless they agreed to surrender the diamonds at once, he would drop a planet buster—that's a Class-A oxygen bomb. The Aldebaran's return message, expressed in the crudest possible language, told the commander what he could do with the bomb."

"Did they now?" Laertes exclaimed in obvious delight.

"The commander ordered the bomb dropped. It had barely left the bay when it was detonated. I hardly need to add that the ship and all personnel were completely destroyed."

"What happened?"

"We can only conclude that the Aldebarans possess a means of setting off a bomb the minute it's released fifty miles above their planet. Obviously, in terms of their culture, they have advanced as far as we have in terms of our culture. But since they are oriented to theft and fraud and fighting, it puts us at a distinct disadvantage."

There was no indication that Laertes Solomon found this an unpleasant phospect.

"We have three choices," the President continued. "We can let them continue to commit acts of piracy, which is unthinkable. We can declare war against them and because it would be nine sun systems against one planet we would win eventually, but it would be a long and costly war. Or we can find some method which will permit us to live with the Aldebarans without being molested."

"Why come to me about it?" Laertes demanded again. "You've run the League all these years without consulting a mere university professor. Why bother now?"

"We," the President admitted frankly, "are not equipped to deal with a criminal culture. Five centuries with no crime has left us unable to understand it. Even the literature on crime has mostly disappeared." His eyes flicked about the room. "You will be interested to know, Dr. Solomon, that we set up the problem on a giant computor and then ran the personality cards of every citizen in the nine systems of the League. Out of all these billions, the computor picked out only one card as containing the proper qualifications. That card was yours."

That computor's more intelligent than I would have thought," Laertes said with his usual modesty.

"Dr. Solomon, we want you to go to Aldebaran Three and try to come to some understanding with them. Secretly we will give you the rank of a full League ambassador. You will have a free hand in any negotiations with the Aldebarans, subject only to the final approval of Congress."

"Why should I go?" Laertes Solomon asked. "I have no interest in you, your political party or the Trusts. I'd be just as happy to see all of you flat on your backsides. Why should I lift a finger to help you?"

The President smiled. "Have you ever heard of a story of the ancients called *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* by Edgar Allan Poe?"

Laertes sat upright. "The first detective story ever written," he exclaimed. "First published nine hundred years ago. You know where there is a copy of it?"

AT THAT the President nodded. "The government owns a copy. Not a first edition, of course, but probably the only copy in existence. When you have concluded this mission, that copy will belong to you."

Laertes struggled with temptation.

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"We plan," the President continued smoothly, watching Laertes, "on sending you in a small ship, with only one companion. He will be subject to your orders. We had thought that as soon as you were outside the League limits we would announce that we have discovered a crime for the first time in five hundred years. The two escaping criminals will be thoroughly described. Thus you will arrive on Aldebaran in the guise of fugitives from justice."

The thought of the Poe story plus the opportunity to play the role of an undercover agent was too much for Laertes Kwang Solomon. He continued to struggle with the temptation, but it was a shabby effort and he soon capitulated.

"All right," he said gruffly.

"Good." President Samoti rose from his chair. "The young man who will accompany you has been waiting outside in the corridor. I will call him in." He strode across to the door and swung it open. "Come in, Jon," he said.

Although the man who entered the room wore green sport clothes, the set of his shoulders revealed that he hadn't long been out of uniform.

"Doctor," the President said, "this is Jon Gaynor, a Sergeant in the Solar System Police Force, on leave of absence. I think you will find him to be a very capable young man."

"How do you do, sir," the young man said. He shook hands with an eagerness that made Laertes feel better about not having had any choice in the selection of his companion.

The President left soon afterward. Laertes Solomon made arrangements with the hotel to send his things back to Mars, then he and Jon Gaynor went up to the space cruiser parked on top of the hotel.

They stopped briefly on Mars where Laertes packed a portable trunk which was equipped with a special lock. When it was packed there was a brief argument as to whether Laertes should or should not don a disguise of his own invention, which included a drooping false mustache. Jon Gaynor finally prevailed and Laertes climbed back in the cruiser unadorned.

As they crossed the imaginary space line that marked the boundary of the League, they sat, Laertes beaming, listening to a League newscaster describe them as dangerous criminals.

II

ALDEBARAN THREE was a lazy green ball beneath them. Laertes Solomon wore the expression of a small boy about to make his first rocket flight. His multicolored clothes were more mussed than usual and his hair had been rumpled until it resembled a tangled halo. He suppressed the grin that persisted in spreading over his face and glanced at his companion. Jon Gaynor, S. S. Sergeant on leave, looked the part. His face was grim as he looked at the planet dead ahead.

"What's the matter, boy?" Laertes demanded. "You look like you'd just been caught in the midst of an adolescent fling at sex. We're about to make history, son. At least, get a glint in your eye."

"Yes, sir," Jon said, but the expression on his face didn't change.

"What's the matter, son?" Laertes asked.

"I know that this is an important assignment," the young man said, "and I'm glad that it gives me a chance to work with you. But I'm not looking forward to Aldebaran. According to what President Samoti said, those people are completely immoral. Not only do they live by stealing, but they—that is, they generally conduct themselves in an indecent manner."

Laertes Solomon peered at his young companion. "Are you, by any chance, making some sort of skittish reference to the sex lives of the Aldebarans?"

Jon Gaynor nodded, his face flushed.

"Well, bless me," Laertes exclaimed. "What is happening to the younger generation? I must have been even younger

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than you when the university president's daughter and I—" He broke off at the sight of Jon's face and chuckled. "Well, perhaps I'd better save that story until you're a bit more sophisticated. By the way, I hope you've taken precautions to protect your wallet."

"It's in my pocket," Jon said, "but nearly everything of value is in a money belt which I'm wearing beneath my clothes."

Laertes grunted and turned back to watch the planet rapidly expanding beneath them.

As they dropped through the atmosphere, Laertes contacted the Aldebaran spaceport and received permission to land. A few minutes later, the cruiser settled to the ground. Jon Gaynor cut the power and stood up.

"Well," he said glumly, "I guess this is it."

"In a minute it is," Laertes said cryptically. He went forward and bent over the control panel, his heavy body masking his actions.

"What are you doing?" Jon asked.

"Indulging in an old man's whim," Laertes said, straightening up. "Let us not keep our hosts waiting, son." His voice held a suggestion of a smile.

Jon Gaynor opened the inner door and they stepped into the air-lock. He threw open the outer door and at the same time pressed the delayed-closing key. They descended to the ground and the outer door closed after them as they went down.

There were about a dozen Aldebarans on hand to meet them and for a minute the two groups stared at each other. Four of the Aldebarans were non-human, although they stood erect and wore the same brief white tunics the others did. They had long necks and low, flat heads. Their features were sufficiently reptilian to suggest that they were evolved from a lizard race. Their bodies were covered with bright green scales. What had once been front feet had developed into three-fingered hands with pointed nails.

IN A WAY, the human Aldebarans were almost as startling as the others. In form and features, they were almost the duplicates of Terrans. But their skins were uniformly blue—a very light blue like a Terran sky on an exceptionally clear day. Their hair was either white or a russet red. As they drew nearer, Laertes noticed that the outer parts of their eyes were the same light blue, while the iris was a wispy white, looking not unlike a tiny cloud against a minute sky.

One of the group, a girl, stepped forward. Her brief tunic gave ample evidence that she was formed like Terran girls—only more so. She glanced at Laertes, then looked to Jon. A glint of interest came into her eyes.

"You are the men from Terra?" she asked. There were bird-like trills in her voice.

"I am Laertes Solomon and my companion is Jon Gaynor," Laertes said. "We are, as you have inferred, from Terra. We are here seeking sanctuary.

"Welcome to Yllia," the girl said. "I am Lemora Yno. I have been appointed to act as your guide." She spoke to both of them but her eyes remained on Jon.

"Yllia?" asked Laertes. "Is that the name of your city?" He nodded in the direction where the city could be seen beyond the limits of the spaceport.

"No. Yllia is the name of our planet, that which you call Aldebaran Three. This city is Yma Dor, named after the two peoples of Yllia. We are the Yma and they—" she indicated the non-humans—"are the Dors. Come. I will introduce you."

She led them to the others and introduced them. The names followed so fast upon one another that Laertes caught none of them. He was vaguely aware that there was a slight difference in the names of the humans and the non-humans, the latter's last names being monosyllabic. He was more aware of the fingers brushing lightly at his pockets as the Aldebarans, or Yllians, crowded around to greet them, but he only smiled

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the broader.

"Now," said Lemora Yno, "I will escort you into the city. It will be necessary for you to be tested by the Trumachine, but then you may relax and enjoy yourselves. Unless there is a negative report . . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"What is the Trumachine?" Laertes asked.

"It is a machine which detects any illegal traits of honesty which may be in you," she said. "Of course, as celebrated criminals from Terra you will have no trouble getting a positive report."

"But—" Jon Gaynor began in a worried voice.

"We welcome the opportunity," Laertes interrupted, "to prove our dishonesty. Are all of your friends also escorting us into the city?"

"Oh, no, they will stay to guard your cruiser."

Laertes only smiled. He saw that Jon was on the point of saying something so he jabbed his elbow in the young man's ribs. Jon grunted and was silent.

The three of them had walked only a few hundred yards when there was a scream of sheer terror and pain from behind them. They looked around to see one of the Aldebarans rolling on the ground near their cruiser.

"What the—" began Jon.

"I took the liberty," Laertes said blandly, "of using a small invention of mine which connected the surface of our ship directly with the storage battery. It was careless of me, Miss Yno, not to warn your friends about trying to dismantle it. I'm afraid one of them has had a rather shocking experience."

The girl looked at him with something like respect in her face. Jon also looked at him. Although he was glad to learn that their cruiser wouldn't be stolen, he seemed a little shocked to learn that Laertes was capable of protecting it so well.

THEY approached a long slim vehicle, rather resembling the air-cars in the League. A Dor sat in the front seat. Laertes, Jon and the girl got into the rear. The vehicle started, but instead of rising into the air it ran smoothly along the ground.

"A surface-car," Jon exclaimed.

"Yes," said Lemora Yno. "We have both air-cars and surface-cars, but we usually prefer these when we're in the city. If you are interested in our city, there on the right—that large building—is where our *Cheelom* meets to pass laws."

She continued to point out various buildings as they sped along, until she was interrupted by an exclamation from Jon Gaynor. She stopped and she and Laertes looked at him.

"Sorry," he said sheepishly. "I just discovered that my wallet is missing."

"Oh, yes," Laertes said. "I should have mentioned it before, son. Miss Yno conveniently lifted it while we were still on the field. I took the liberty of retrieving it for you." As he passed the wallet over to Jon, he noticed the girl make a small gesture at her tunic. "It was under the edge of her tunic," Laertes continued, "where there seems to be a clever arrangement of hooks and clasps for just such uses."

"You are clever," the girl admitted.

Laertes beamed at her like a small boy being handed a report card with straight A's. "I was a little pressed for time," he said, "but I did manage to pick up one or two things." He began to unload objects from the pockets of his lemon yellow coat. Soon there were nine wallets and various strange trinkets in his lap. Laertes beamed at his two companions.

"You are truly remarkable," Lemora Yno said. "If your friend is as good as you are, the two of you will have no trouble fitting into our way of life."

"He is," Laertes assured her.

"But—" Jon Gaynor started to protest.

"He is merely more modest than I am," Laertes interrupted. He kicked Jon on the shin to emphasize the point. "Oh, yes, I did manage one other thing. I'm not sure that it should be called a

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wallet, although it does contain valuables." He removed a final object from his pocket. It resembled a small life preserver.

Lemora Yno clutched at the upper part of her tunic and smiled in defeat. "It's called a breast-purse," she said. "You are cleverer than I thought, Laertes Solomon."

Jon Gaynor looked from one to the other. "You mean you—" He gestured in the direction of the girl and was unable to finish. His face was red.

Laertes chuckled. "Reminded me of the days when I was young," he said. "The motivation was somewhat different but the result was about the same."

Jon Gaynor looked his disapproval. "At least," he said, "you should return Miss Yno's purse to her."

The girl looked horrified. "That would be illegal. You mustn't do anything like that. If I want it back I shall have to steal it."

"I should say so," Laertes said piously. He put the wallets back in his pocket, on the far side from Lemora.

AFTER a short ride, the vehicle came to a stop in front of a large, square building. As they climbed out, Laertes caught sight of a man in a peculiar, crouched position on the sidewalk. As they drew nearer, he saw that the man's hands and feet were imprisoned through four holes in a heavy board so that his legs and arms were held rigidly at right angles to his body. Instead of crouching, as Laertes had thought, he was seated on a small stool. A number of young, both Ymas and Dors, stood around him in an attitude of waiting.

"What's that?" Laertes asked.

"A convict," the girl explained. "He has been convicted of honesty and is now serving his sentence."

Even as she spoke, they saw a man, the cut and color of his tunic suggesting a uniform, approach. The youngsters made way for him and watched eagerly as he began stuffing something into the pockets of the prisoner.

"A bailiff," Lemora said in answer to Laertes' questioning look. "He is empowered by the court to attach all of the convict's wealth. Any property is converted into money and valuables stones. As you can see, the man's pockets are filled and then the children practice picking his pockets."

"Excellent training," Laertes agreed. "How long does this go on?"

"Until the man's wealth is gone. Then he is released."

"I should think he'd have to be pretty wealthy to stay there long. Those kids ought to be able to empty his pockets in about two minutes."

"It's not that simple," Lemora said. "Each child must take his turn. If the others see him picking a pocket, he must put back whatever he got and try again."

They started to edge past the crowd of young Aldebarans. Laertes, still interested in the spectacle, noticed that a small board was hung around the man's neck. On it was some lettering in some strange language. He asked the girl about it.

"It's an old Yllian proverb," she said. "It says: Honesty pays."

"Honesty pays?" exclaimed Jon Gaynor. "But that's wrong, isn't it? It should be honesty doesn't pay. You've arrested him for being honest."

"And he's paying," Lemora said, gesturing to where the first small boy was approaching the prisoner. "He'll go on paying until he has nothing left. Then he'll have to go crooked or starve."

While Jon was digesting this, and finding it pretty indigestible, they turned and mounted the short span of steps leading into the building.

INSIDE, they soon entered a large room almost entirely filled with machinery. One wall was given over to dozens of dials and in the center there was a large square of graph paper. A mechanical arm, holding a pen, rested at one end of it.

There were shuffling footsteps and one of the Dors appeared. His scales were a

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darker green and Laertes guessed that this indicated that he was old. He bent his neck and peered at them from bright eyes.

"Greetings, Pleeno," the girl said. "We have two visitors claiming dishonorable intentions. You are to test them."

"Pinks," the Dod said. "I don't recall ever seeing any Yma-shaped beings with pink skins before. Are they intelligent?"

"Oh, yes. The large one has displayed great cleverness, but of course it might be assumed."

"How are they identified?" the Dor asked.

"They have names. The large one is called Laertes Solomon. The pretty one is Jon Gaynor."

Laertes chuckled as Jon blushed. "Don't you think," he said to the girl, "you might complete the introduction and tell us the name of your long-necked friend?"

"I'm sorry," she said. "He is called Pleeno Sa."

"Greetings, Pleeno," Laertes said amiably. "I presume you are the custodian of this contraption which you claim will locate any hidden honesty in a man?"

"Yes," the Dor said. He was still examining the two of them with curiosity. "It does detect honesty. In the fifty years I have operated it, it has not failed once. Do you find this a miracle? Perhaps you think it is done with magic?"

"How does it work?" Laertes asked, ignoring the fact that the Dor seemed to think that they came from some primitive society where machines were unknown.

"I will explain it simply so that you may understand," Pleeno Sa said. He indicated a sort of reclining chair. "The one to be tested is placed here. We attach to him at various points small instruments which are very sensitive. These take notice of the heart beat, the blood pressure, body temperature, amount of perspiration on the skin, as well as the chemical balances in the body. We have prepared certain questions for the subject to answer and certain situations which we ask him to visualize. The man who is not contaminated by honesty reacts to everything with excitement, a zest for living, which will be properly registered. Honesty does not stir the blood, so the honest man is revealed by the negative responses. You understand this?"

Laertes nodded amiably. "It is quite similar to a number of testing machines in use on our planet. The principle, in fact, has been known to our people for almost a thousand years. The original was a rather simple device used to detect lies."

"A thousand years?" exclaimed Pleeno Sa. "Is it possible?"

Before Laertes could answer, there was a startled exclamation from Jon Gaynor. He swung around to face Laertes, rubbing his hip.

"You jabbed me with something," he said accusingly.

"My dear boy," Laertes said in outraged innocence, spreading his hands to show that they were empty, "that is an absurd thought. I possess a strong paternal feeling for you. I wouldn't think of jabbing you. Do I understand that you experienced a sharp pain in your posterior?"

"I did," Jon said, his voice still heavy with suspicion.

"Ah," Laertes said with a knowing air. "I fear you're in for another one of your attacks. Come, my boy, you must sit down before it strikes."

"What the hell are you talking—" began Jon.

"Now, now," Laertes interrupted. He took Jon by the arm and steered him to a chair, meanwhile talking rapidly. "You mustn't get excited, my boy. You've had these attacks before and every time they've been preceded by a pain in the gluteal region. Relax, son. You're among friends. Just take it easy and everything will soon be right." He maneuvered the young man into a chair as carefully as if he were somebody's grandmother. He stepped back and looked down at him. "How do you feel

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now, son?"

"I feel fine," Jon insisted. There was a glazed look in his eyes. "But what the devil's the matter with you, Laertes? Are you pulling something? I've never had—never had—I—" He slumped forward and would have fallen to the floor if Laertes hadn't caught him.

"Poor boy," Laertes murmured.

"What is it?" Lemora Yno asked.

"A seizure," Laertes said. "The poor lad has been subject to them since the age of ten. Excitement brings them on. It must have been our escape from Terra."

"What can be done?"

"The seizure must run its course," Laertes explained. "He'll recover in about three hours. Perhaps there is a couch where we can make him comfortable while I'm being tested?"

"In the next room," Lemora said. She threw open the door. Pleeno Sa helped Laertes to carry the unconscious Jon into the next room and stretch him out on the couch.

"I am most sorry," Laertes said as they returned to the testing lab, "that my friend's unfortunate attack has interfered with his test. Perhaps an appointment can be made for him tomorrow or the following day."

"Certainly," the Dor said politely. "Whenever the lad is feeling better."

"Better make it the day after tomorrow," Laertes said. "He's usually a little weak the first day after an attack. Now then, my dear sir, I am at your service."

Within a few minutes, Laertes Solomon was stretched out on the testing chair, with wires attached to every part of his anatomy.

III

SOME three hours later, Laertes Solomon was making himself comfortable in the best suite of rooms in the Yllian Palace Hotel. Lemora Yno had escorted Laertes and Jon, the latter carried by two Yllians, there immediately after Laertes was tested. She'd left, promising to return in a few hours and show them the city.

Laertes had just taken a shower and trussed himself in a mauve robe. His clothes were draped over another chair. On top of the dresser he had dumped the wallets he had gathered since landing on the planet. Near them was a hypodermic needle, small enough to fit easily into the palm of the hand.

After a glance at Jon, stretched out on the bed and still unconscious, Laertes turned to a local magazine which he had deftly slid into his pocket as they were registering. With the aid of an Yllian-Terran dictionary, which he'd talked the clerk into loaning him, he began laboriously to read. The title he translated as *The Yllian Interplanetary Digest*. He soon discovered that the contents—used without benefit of copyright payment, he was sure—came from all over the universe. Many were from cultures in the other extreme of the galaxy, cultures that were not even known in the League, and all of the articles dealt with aspects of planetary wealth. Obviously it was meant to be of assistance to any Yllians who intended taking their talents to other climes. Laertes found them all highly interesting and by the time he'd finished, he had also learned considerable about the Yllian language.

There was a groan from the direction of the bed and Jon Gaynor struggled up on one elbow. His gaze went uncertainly around the room, stopped for a moment on the hypodermic needle on the dresser, then moved on to rest accusingly on Laertes.

"You drugged me," he said.

Laertes nodded. "I'm afraid I did, son."

"Why?"

"That test to detect honesty. If they'd ever strapped you down to that machine, our little scheme would have been blown higher than a runaway space ship. I like you, son, but you're as innocent as a babe. One look at your chart and that old boy would have stopped puttering

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around his infernal machine and yelled cops. Lemora, even though she likes you, would have joined in the yelling. It was the only thing to do."

"Where is she?" Jon asked, looking around the room.

"She toddled off somewhere, but she's due back soon to show us around the town."

"Won't they still want to test me?"

"Day after tomorrow," Laertes said. "By that time I'll think of something else." He pushed himself out of his chair and went into the bathroom. He came back holding a glass of water and a small white pill. "Take this, son. It'll make you feel better."

Jon obediently sat up and took the pill. He washed it down with the water.

"That'll take the cobwebs out of your head within a few minutes," Laertes said. "Then you'd better take a shower and get dressed in your finest. Lemora will soon be here to pick us up. She's quite a girl."

"She's beautiful," Jon said. His face clouded. "It's difficult to look at her and realize that she's so completely dishonest and immoral."

"When you're in love with a girl, a lack of morals makes it more enjoyable. If I were thirty years younger, lad, I'd give you some competition."

"You're welcome to," Jon said shortly, but his tone belied the words. "I prefer my women to be as respectable and as moral as they are in the League."

Laertes chuckled and said nothing.

After a while, Jon Gaynor raised his head to look at the older man. "What about you?" he asked. "How did you get out of being tested?"

"I didn't."

"What happened?"

"I passed," Laertes said with pride. "Not only that, but I'm told that I rang up the most impressive display of dishonesty in the history of the planet. I think I'm on my way to becoming a bit of a celebrity."

"I don't understand," Jon said. "Surely you must be Dwoskin rated at the regular intervals."

"Oh, yes," Laertes said. He chuckled. "In fact, I have a very high morality rating in the League. It always seems to surprise the officials. I've often thought they snoop around their machine afterwards to be sure there are no blown fuses."

"Then how did you manage?"

"I'm not sure it was necessary, but I confess I cheated a bit."

"Cheated a machine?"

LAERTES SOLOMON looked not unlike an overgrown cat at the moment. He smiled and seemed on the point of licking an invisible feather from his lips. "Machines, my boy, can be outwitted. Don't ever spread the information carelessly when you get back to the League. It might destroy our whole civilization to know that a mere professor can get the best of a machine."

"How?"

"It has been rumored," said Laertes in his best lecture manner, "that Laertes Kwang Solomon is a hopeless old fogey because he insists on reading a type of primitive literature known as mysteries. But that's were I learned the trick. A writer named Erle Stanley Gardner used it in one of his novels way back in the Twentieth Century. He used it in reference to the simple lie detector, but the principle is the same as the Yllians use—or that we use on the Dwoskin Computor, for that matter. It is based on the idea that a lie, or anything that's dishonest or immoral causes a chemical change in the body."

"Spare me the lecture," Jon said. "Just tell me how you did it. Maybe I can use the same method when they test me."

"You can, but will you?" Laertes said with a grin. "All I did was to remember with considerable detail an incident of some twenty years ago. We had a professor of deductive logic at the university—a stuffy old duffer—who was married to a red-headed wench half his age. She was from Procyon. She'd al-

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ready learned how to conceal her real feelings in the tests; if she hadn't she would have sent the Dwoskin Computor right off its trolley. I may be an old man, lad, but I've got my memories. She had skin like milk and honey and her breasts were like priceless wine goblets—"

He broke off with a chuckle. Jon Gaynor was already heading for the bathroom. The back of his neck was fiery red.

Lemora Yno arrived only a few seconds before Jon reappeared. She immediately broke off the routine remarks she was making to Laertes to greet him. Laertes smiled, but made no comment, when he noticed that Jon had taken special pains with his clothes.

They had dinner at a restaurant that was in general appearance not unlike those on Terra. The food, however, was all strange and exotic, but the two Terrans enjoyed it. Twice during the meal Laertes gravely reached across the table and returned Jon's wallet to him after Lemora had taken it. Each time the girl laughed and Jon was embarrassed.

When they were through dinner, Laertes insisted on paying. He gave the cashier a large Yllian bill and immediately spotted it when he tried a folded-bill trick which made half his right change seem to be the full amount. In the argument that followed, Laertes managed to sneak two large bills and a valuable electronic-pen from the till. The cashier followed them to the sidewalk to congratulate Laertes. When he finally retreated to the restaurant, he carried along an empty wallet that Laertes had left in his pocket for just such an occasion. And Laertes was admiring the stone in the new shirt-pin he'd just acquired.

AT SUPERFICIAL glance the city of Yma Dor resembled many another galactic city, but when one looked closer there were small differences. The buildings were as beautifully modern as any in the League, but windows and doors were all well recessed and protected by intricate grilled work. The sidewalks on each side of the street were each almost as broad as the street itself. Now that dark had fallen, the walks were brilliantly lighted. Not only were there lights overhead, but bright spotlights were recessed into the sides of buildings and along the curb. Laertes was curious enough to ask the girl about it.

"It makes it more difficult to pick a person's pockets," she explained. "A narrow walk and dim lights such as are found in many cities throughout the galaxy make it too easy. Here, at least, enjoyment is more important than profit, so we make it difficult. Now then, where would you like to go your first evening here?"

"What choice do we have?" Laertes asked.

"We have few of the stadium entertainments I'm told you Terrans like," she said. "We have many very fine dramas and art shows, but those are available only on the vistascreen and broadcasts are available only on sets in the privacy of individual rooms. Thus the enjoyment of them is not subject to interruptions. I'm afraid that leaves us only two choices. We can go to a Coliseum of Sex or to a Gambling Palace."

"Coliseum of Sex?" Jon asked. "What is that?"

"You don't have them on Terra?" she asked. Her tone indicated that it was a pity. "We have hundreds of them. They are large, luxurious buildings with many, many rooms. There is a set fee for entering, which covers everything. They are owned by the government. For a long time they represented a problem, since you might describe them as an honest business, but it was finally solved by having the government pass a law making them illegal."

"The government owns them, but it also passed a law against them?" Jon asked. He sounded a little dazed.

"Oh, yes."

"Are they ever raided?"

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"Of course not," she said. "The government bribes the officials not to raid them."

Laertes noticed the expression on Jon's face and stepped into the breach. "It sounds like a very tidy arrangement," he said, "but you haven't yet told Jon what goes on there."

"As soon as you enter," Lemora said, "you place all of your clothes and valuables in a special safe with as many combinations as there are customers. Your combination opens only the section in which your things are stored. Then you just wander around. There's always plenty to drink and eat, if you like, and every room is filled with music. Some of the rooms also have special music patterns visiplayed over the ceiling. As soon as a man and woman are attracted to one another, they go to one of the mating rooms. Woul you like to go?"

"I'm an old man," Laertes Solomon said, but there was a twinkle in his eyes. "I'd better try the gambling palace. You two kids run along to the Coliseum."

"We wouldn't think of leaving you," said Jon hurriedly. His voice was a little too loud. "Let's all go to the gambling palace."

Lemora Yno was looking at Laertes with curiosity. "How old are you?" she asked.

"Sixty-two," he said.

"That's not old. And you have a fine robust figure. I'm sure that you would have no trouble finding favor in many a woman's eye—or of giving a good accounting of yourself." She hesitated, glancing merrily at Jon. "Is the pretty one jealous? If not, I—"

"Let's all go to the Gambling Palace," Jon said a little louder.

Laertes chuckled. "I like you, wench," he said. "Perhaps later I'll take a look at one of your Coliseums. You've made me feel younger already. Why, I remember the time when—"

"Let's all go to the Gambling Palace," Jon said again. This time his voice was definitely too loud. A number of Yllians stopped on the street to stare at him.

"That's right, boy, speak up when you want to be heard," Laertes said. "All right, let's go gamble before junior here ruptures himself."

They walked on down the brightly-lighted street until Lemora indicated a doorway opposite them. They turned and went in.

THEY found themselves in a huge room, fully the size of a galactic block. Everywhere there were clusters of Yllians, both Ymas and Dors. Their voices produced a steady hum of sound. Laertes sniffed the air with the attitude of the confirmed gambler.

"The games are crooked?" he asked.

"Of course," Lemora said. "The object is to try to overcome their control of the games."

They approached the first game. It consisted of a round pool of water. A counter ran around the edge of the pool and on this there were large squares in color. Every shade of the spectrum was represented. The players put their money on the colored squares. The operator sat high above the game. Innumerable small colored balls floated on the surface of the water, one for each color represented on the counter. When all the bets were down, the operator would press a button in front of him, creating a miniature geyser in the pool. The thin waterspout would shoot three feet above the surface of the pool, carrying one of the colored balls with it. It determined the winning color.

Lemora made a few small bets, but Laertes only watched. Although the operator seemed to have only the one button that created the geyser, Laertes noticed that his other hand went to the edge of his chair each time. If all of the colored squares were covered, the one with the smallest bet invariably won; if the bets were fewer, an uncovered color won.

Laertes finally grunted in disgust and moved on. There were a great variety of games, some of them apparently re-

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lated to games once played on Terra before gambling had ceased to exist. Others were completely alien to anything Laertes had seen. Most of the games were powered in some fashion, although there were a few manual games where skill seemed to be the important factor.

Laertes kept looking over the games without placing a bet. He seemed to be looking for something. Finally, he came to another powered game. It consisted of a huge circular table. Around the outer rim there were small pockets with a number corresponding to each pocket. There was a larger, unnumbered pocket in the exact center of the table. In the area between the center and the rim pockets a single white ball whirled madly. Bets were made on the numbered pockets and if the ball finally spun into one of them the bettor won. If it spun into the center pocket, the house won.

As Laertes watched, he saw an occasional player win. But none won a second time. He could almost feel the struggle between the players and the operator, in which an individual would now and then gain an advantage only to lose it. On the next play, the spinning ball would approach the winning pocket only to veer away at the last moment and plop into the center pocket.

Leaning heavily against the table, Laertes placed a bet. The white ball spun madly, then, slowing down, suddenly darted into the pocket in front of him. The operator's gaze flicked over Laertes with mild interest.

Laertes tugged at the top of his pants and left his winnings on the number. The white ball spun again. When it slowed down, it seemed to hesitate briefly, then it slowly rolled across the table to drop into the pocket in front of Laertes. This time he won, along with considerable money, a longer stare from the operator. Laertes blandly returned the stare, once more tugging at his pants.

On the third spin, the ball seemed headed for the center pocket only to regain a lost momentum and dart back into the same pocket. Laertes assumed his most innocent expression as he became the center of attention.

OTHERS drifted over from other tables to watch as Laertes continued to win. Ostensibly oblivious to the individuals crowding around him, Laertes repeatedly stuffed his winnings into the side pocket of his jacket. It was that which attracted the Yllians almost as much as the fact that he was winning.

He had just raked in his eighth win when there was a startled exclamation from beside him. An Yllian hurriedly withdrew his hand from Laertes' pocket. A large rat-trap dangled from his fingers.

"My most prized possession," Laertes murmured. "It was clever of you to obtain it."

The other Yllians roared their appreciation of the joke.

Laertes continued to play for another hour, winning every time. Finally, he himself grew tired of it and walked away from the table. Lemora Yno and Jon Gaynor followed him out to the street. There was a puzzled expression on the girl's face.

"The finger-trap in your pocket was a very clever idea," she said, "but there is something I do not understand, Laertes. You clearly put all the money you won into that same pocket yet, after the finger-trap was removed, there were several who tried to obtain the money. I did myself and the pocket was empty."

Laertes chuckled. He swung open his coat and showed where he'd cut a slit through the coat near the top of the pocket. The mouth of a small bag protruded from the top of his trousers near the slit in his coat.

"But you didn't know we were going to gamble when you got dressed," Jon said.

"I came prepared for a number of eventualities," Laertes said modestly. "It had occurred to me that this would be an excellent arrangement for carrying various articles without the need for

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being constantly on guard. I merely adapted it to the present needs."

"So that's why you dress the way you do," Lemora said. "Does the costume also conceal the method you used to win on the table—or is that a secret formula?"

Laertes chuckled again. He patted himself on the stomach. "I belted on a magnet-power pack," he said, "thinking it might be handy in picking up a few objects. When we entered the gambling palace, the problem became one of looking for a spot where a magnet might be used. As you know, I finally found it. The ball had a steel core and the operator was using a magnet to pull it into the house-pocket."

"I knew that," said Lemora, frowning. "So did others. In fact, a number of players have tried using magnets against the game but have never won more than once."

"Of course. I noticed that. When a player had a magnet which was more powerful than the one the operator was using, he'd win that once. But on the next play, the operator would either switch to a more powerful magnet, or he was using one that could be stepped up. I merely stepped up the power of my own after each play, so that I was always using just a bit more magnetic pull than he was."

"You will become an important man in our world," Lemora predicted.

THEY walked slowly back toward the hotel, the girl pointing out various sights as they went. There were safety walks at every corner, and one pedestrian walk constructed a level above the street, where one could stroll and no one was allowed to rob him. They were, she explained, for the use of lovers and philosophers. As they went along, Laertes noticed that Jon and the girl were holding hands. He not only approved of their interest in each other; he took advantage of it to relieve Lemora of a few things she carried in the usual place under the edge of her tunic.

When they arrived back at the hotel, Laertes went straight up to their suite. Lemora murmured something about showing him the four moons of Yllia and dragged Jon in the direction of the hotel roof.

When Jon finally entered their rooms an hour or so later, Laertes was in bed with the lights out, but he was still awake.

"Got your wallet?" Laertes asked.

"Yes, I have," Jon said. His voice was still faintly stiff with disapproval. "She never even tried to get it once I explained that I found thievery a very unattractive trait in a girl."

"Oh, you explained that, did you?" Laertes asked. "And she didn't yell for the cops to have you locked up for honesty?"

"She did not. Miss Yno is a very nice girl. It's just that she's been raised under bad influences."

"I suppose you explained that to her?"

"Naturally. She understood at once. After all, she's a very bright girl."

"She's a bright one, I'll grant you," Laertes said. "While you were explaining everything, did you happen to tell her the real reason why we're here?"

"Of course not. I merely told her the traits I admired in a woman and she began changing at once. For the rest, we merely talked. Partly about the Yllian moons, which are beautiful."

"No hanky-panky in the moonlight?"

"No," Jon said stiffly.

"Sissy," scoffed Laertes. "Four moons and you only talk. When I was a lad your age, one moon was enough excuse for me to—"

"I don't want to hear about it," Jon interrupted. "I've always had great respect for you, Dr. Solomon, but I'm rapidly losing it. I don't understand how you've managed to fool the authorities all these years. You should have been jailed years ago as a Dwoskin Negative. But Miss Yno and —" He broke off with a startled exclamation.

"What's wrong?" Laertes asked sourly. "Stab yourself with one of your wings?"

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"My money belt," Jon exclaimed a little wildly. "The one I was wearing underneath my clothes. It—it's gone."

Laertes Solomon's booming laughter filled the room.

IV

WHEN Jon Gaynor awakened the following morning, Laertes was already up and dressed. Using his dictionary, he was reading what appeared to be some sort of newspaper. Jon had never seen a newspaper, but he had seen pictures of them. On the dresser near Laertes there was also a fresh pile of wallets, several of them breast-purses, indicating that Laertes had already been out making new social contacts.

"Good morning," Laertes said when he saw that Jon was awake.

"Good morning," Jon mumbled.

"What's the matter, son?" Laertes asked. "Still being upset about your money belt?"

"No," said Jon, not entirely truthfully. "I wouldn't mind this whole set-up if I thought it would do some good. I was pretty tickled to get this assignment because I thought *we* were going to serve the Galactic League. Now, I discover that you've been able to conceal certain tendencies all these years, and I feel that you're just enjoying yourself here and have no intention of carrying out the project for which we were sent. And I don't know where to start on it myself. I suppose we can't arrest a whole planet."

"Especially," Laertes said dryly, "when that's already been tried, only the arresting officer—in this case a League battleship—found his club blowing up in his own face. Sure, I'm having fun. I'm having a hell of a time, son. I haven't had so much fun since the time when I was a boy and got trapped in an old rocket ship with three girls. And one of them was the daughter of the Minister of Morals, too."

"That's what I mean," Jon muttered darkly.

"Relax, son. The old man isn't finished yet. I grant you I wouldn't want to live in a culture like this all my life. I grant you that I am also in favor of absence of crime. It is important for the Yllians, or Aldebarans, to grow up and become a more useful part of the galaxy. But it's partly because we need them. There's something vital about them, whereas we in the League have begun to dry up. Sure, you can do away with crime—but you can't do away with all human passions. The Dwoskin Morality Ratings are just as much hogwash as that honesty detector they use here."

Jon Gaynor stared sullenly at him without saying anything.

"It's pretty tough," Laertes said gently, "if you've been raised to believe say, that everybody who doesn't part his hair on the right side is an untouchable and then suddenly you meet a beautiful girl who makes all your nerve ends stand at attention—only she parts her hair on the left side."

"It's not quite that simple," Jon said.

"Almost, son. Anyway, to come back to your original thought, while you've been getting your beauty sleep, I've been out working on the League problem. Only I prefer to think of it as the problem of the League and of Yllia."

"You mean you've already started something that'll straighten this planet out?"

"I've taken the first step. I've been out learning how things run here. It's a very interesting set-up."

"Interesting? It's a planet of thieves and immoral degenerates."

"A man," Laertes said mildly, "is not degenerate because he wants to roll a pretty girl in the hay. Nor is she because she wants him to. As you will learn, my boy. Now, as to the Yllian government . . ."

"Do they have one?"

"Oh, yes. The planet is ruled by an Yllone—in powers not too different from our League president. There is an election every two years. Everyone turns out to vote with great enthusiasm, even

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though they know that the elected candidate will be the one who has most successfully stuffed the ballot boxes. Upon assuming office, the Yllone appoints one hundred Ymas and Dors as members of the Cheelom. This body, while somewhat like our Congress, simultaneously serves as assistants to the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. They pass all the laws and are permitted any graft they can think of, although they are forced to give half of all graft to the Yllone. Special elections may be held any time a charge of honesty can be proved against the Yllone."

"They probably never have any special elections then."

LAERTES shook his head. "Occasionally," he said. "There is an underworld syndicate of honest men on Yllia. I am told the most successful ones manage to get away with it by posing as dishonest citizens. They make a big display of robbing one another, then secretly settle accounts with each other later. This syndicate has occasionally reached political figures. And there seems to be some record of politicians who were framed on honesty charges by opponents."

"Framed on honesty charges," said Jon with a laugh. "That's a good one."

"I agree," Laertes said gravely. "I believe I forgot to mention that one can only become a candidate for office here by proving that he has committed a minimum of fifteen thefts in the past week. Actually, most of the theft and fraud practiced here is done for sheer fun and to sort of keep the hand in. The more serious work is reserved for their visits to other planets. But even there, it is interesting to note that their crimes are of an individual, and therefore petty, nature."

"I suppose you'd prefer that they found some way of bankrupting a whole system?" Jon said.

"It isn't a question of my preference," Laertes said. "I was thinking in terms of their cultural advance. I also find it highly interesting that although they have known nothing of our end of the galaxy until fairly recently, the patterns of their crimes are very similar to that of early Terran crime. For example, the Yllians have done a brisk trade all over the galaxy with a little machine which is guaranteed to manufacture money for the buyer. As long as an Yllian operates it, it does turn out reams of whatever local currency is in demand. Thereafter, it turns out only blank paper."

"So what does that prove?" Jon said. "Except, perhaps, that a crook is a crook no matter where he lives."

Laertes sighed. "It often seems to me," he said, "that the education of our young is sadly neglected. This trip, my boy, will be the making of you. By the way, I believe Miss Yno will be showing up shortly to give us another guided tour. I fear that she will have to be content with your company. I am going to see the Yllone."

"The president? To negotiate?"

"Not exactly to negotiate," Laertes said carefully. "You see, after last night, I seem to be becoming a celebrity of sorts here. It seems only right that I should give the higher officials the opportunity of meeting me. I believe in starting my adult education program at the top. Keep your pockets zippered, my boy. I'll be seeing you." He sailed out of the room before Jon could think of a rejoinder.

The office of the Yllone of Yllia was in a large, impressive building, constructed from some sort of porous stone. It was light blue in color, about the same shade as the skins of the Yllian humans. After being interviewed by a number of minor officials, in the process of which he enriched himself by three wallets, a bag of diamonds, and an electronic pencil, he was finally shown into the office of the Yllone.

THE chief executive of Yllia was a Dor. When he stood up, his flat-topped head towered several inches above Laertes. He wore a yellow tunic,

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the color indicating his office. It was obvious that he'd just had a scale-manicure for his scaly hide fairly glistened.

"My dear Dr. Solomon," he said, coming to greet Laertes, "I have been hearing impressive things about you since you landed on our planet. It is an honor to have such a distinguished visitor among us. I am, of course, Chenar Xe, Yllone of Yllia, and in the fair name of the Ymas and the Dors I bid you welcome."

He grasped Laertes' right hand with both hands and pumped it vigorously. Laertes gave no indication that he was aware that the Yllone was simultaneously removing his wrist chronometer.

"Thank you," he said gravely. "It's an honor to be here. Naturally, I could hardly wait to meet one of such superior ability that he holds the highest office in the land."

"You are too kind," the Yllone murmured. He steered Laertes to a chair in front of his desk, taking advantage of the opportunity to remove the objects Laertes had gathered on his way in. Then he moved quickly away, his fingers checking on his own valuables. Finding them all intact, he grinned broadly as he sat behind his desk.

"You're visit is especially a pleasant surprise," he continued, "since we were unaware that any of you people were adept in the finer arts of living. Of course our surveys of your planets have been very superficial. . . ."

"Mine is a small talent," Laertes replied modestly. "If I seem superior to my countrymen it is because they have forgotten the minor talents."

"Really?" The Yllone was staring greedily at Laertes' lemon yellow jacket. "You know, my first impression is that your method of clothing yourself is rather cumbersome, but I do find your upper covering rather attractive. It is the Ylloneal color, too."

"I hadn't been aware of that. I shall be careful not to wear it in public again."

The Yllone was still staring at the jacket. Laertes was certain that he had determined to have it and was only pondering the best way to obtain it. A look of sudden decision came into his lidless eyes. He leaned forward and pressed a button on his desk.

"We must," he said, "show proper honor to your visit. You will join me in a drink."

The door opened and an Yma entered. He wore a conventional tunic with the exception of a diagonal yellow stripe which indicated that he was in the service of the Yllone.

"Bring us two *Sittas*," the Yllone ordered. "Then see that I am not disturbed. This is a special occasion."

The Yma nodded and left.

"*Sittas?*" Laertas asked. "A local drink?"

"You haven't tried it?" the Yllone asked. "It is one of the glories of our planet. A *Sitta* is made from the freshly ripened berries of the *Sitta* tree. The berries must be picked early in the morning while the dew is still on them. It is mildly narcotic, but is not habit-forming. I must confess that I don't feel right myself until I've had my morning *Sitta*."

The door opened and the Yma appeared. He carried two tall glasses filled with a jade green fluid. There was a pleasant tinkle to the glasses as he set them down, indicating the presence of ice. The Yma placed a glass in front of each of them and departed.

There was an eagerness in the Yllone's face that made Laertes suspicious. He shifted his gaze to the wall back of the Yllone's head. There was a framed picture there, showing what was apparently a complicated piece of machinery. It looked almost like a blueprint, except that it was done in pastels.

"Is that a sample of your art?" Laertes asked.

The Yllone twisted his head to look at the picture. Laertes reached over and deftly switched the glasses.

"In a way," the Yllone said, smiling. "That is an artist's impression of a small thing I invented. It was presented to me

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after the first successful operation of the invention. You might call it the world's smallest robot."

"Oh?"

The Yllone's pleasure in himself had temporarily eclipsed his desire for the yellow coat. "It is small enough to fit into the palm of the hand," he said, "yet it will open any lock in the galaxy. All that is needed is to press it against the lock. It will then read the combinations, memorizing the reading and the location of any alarms or built-in weapons, then adjust itself to the requirements to open the lock. It cannot fail."

"Then," said Laertes, "you must have had the honor of at least being responsible for the recent robbery of that Terran freighter in mid-flight."

"And the honor of being present and demonstrating my invention. That was its first use—but not its last." His gaze fell on the lemon yellow coat and the look of greed returned. "But we must drink, Dr. Solomon. To a long life and nimble fingers." He raised his glass.

Laertes lifted his own glass. "To full pockets," he responded.

They drank. The *Sitta* had a cool, tangy flavor that was rather pleasant. Almost immediately Laertes felt a slight exhilaration.

"Ahhhhh," the Yllone said with satisfaction. He stared intently at Laertes. "Do you find our *Sitta* pleasant? We believe it to be one of our most cherished possessions. We have often—" A startled look came into his eyes, then he slumped over on his desk. He began snoring loudly at once.

"History and Mickey Finns repeat themselves," Laertes said softly. He got up and began to examine the contents of the desk. When he sat down again, a number of articles were piled in front of him. Among them was his watch. He'd also found several samples of the Yllone's writing and he practiced a few moments on a blank sheet of paper. Then he selected an official letterhead and carefully wrote a short note. He placed the note and his watch in an envelope and sealed it. He stamped it with the official seal of the Yllone of Yllia.

As he had hoped, there was a back door and he sighed gratefully as he stepped through it.

V

BY THE time he reached the hotel, Laertes Solomon was in a fine humor. It was only partly due to the drink he'd had. He chuckled wheezily to himself as he went upstairs to the suite he shared with Jon Gaynor. He was wondering how to take the next step when to his surprise he found Jon and the Yllian girl in the suite. He was slightly disappointed that they were sitting so far apart, but he'd already reached the conclusion that patience was needed with his young Terran friend.

"Well?" Jon demanded as he entered.

"Quite well," Laertes said. "I have just returned from a very pleasant visit with Yllone Chenar Xe."

"Isn't he wonderful?" Lemora said. "He's the most active Yllone we've had in years. Did he tell you about his invention?"

"Oh, yes. I was quite impressed by his courage in personally demonstrating it on the League freighter."

"He's the one?" Jon exclaimed. "Then may we can—*Ow!*" The rather explosive quality to the sentence was caused by the fact that Laertes had just stepped on his foot.

"So sorry," Laertes said with a mock sweetness. He turned to Lemora. "The Yllone also introduced me to *Sitta*. I was so taken with it I'd like to throw a small *Sitta* party right now. Do you suppose you might invite some of your friends?"

"Of course," she said with enthusiasm. "Anyone special or just friends?"

"Just friends," he said blandly. "Although it might be interesting if some of them are inclined towards politics. I'm thinking of a political career for myself."

Within the hour, the suite was filled with assorted Ymas and Dors of both

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sexes summoned by Lemora Yno. The waiters were busily bringing in tall frosted glasses of *Sitta* and the party was getting high. Although it had been his idea, Laertes seemed to lose interest in the party as soon as it was under-way. He drank sparingly and watched the door.

Jon Gaynor sipped suspiciously at the drink, but apparently was reassured by the taste. He drained one glass and reached for another. Some of the disapproval faded from his face.

Finally there came a heavy knock on the door. With an agility all out of contrast with his bulk, Laertes leaped for the door. The Yma who stood there wore a conventional tunic with a very narrow yellow stripe around the bottom. He carried a bulky envelope in his hand.

"Laertes Solomon?" he asked.

"That's me," Laertes said jovially. His fingers twitched but he refrained from grabbing for the package.

"Executive mail," the Yma said and extended the envelope. Laertes took it and closed the door. He held the envelope up, examining it until a number of his guests noticed and crowded around.

"I seem to have some executive mail," he observed, peering at it as if he were near-sighted.

"It's from the Yllone," someone said.

"Whatever can he want?" Laertes said innocently. "I was just with him a couple of hours ago." He looked around until he spotted Lemora. "My dear girl," he said, "would you mind reading it for me? I seem to have misplaced my reading glasses." He extended the envelope.

LEMORA YNO took it and ripped it open. She pulled out the wrist chonometer and held it up. By this time, everyone in the suite was looking. Then she removed the sheet of paper and unfolded it. Her face turned a paler blue.

"Dear Dr. Solomon," she read, "I enjoyed your visit so much that I would like to return this bit of jewelry which I removed from your wrist when we shook hands. This is merely a small way of showing my appreciation. Inasmuch as such returns are frowned upon in Yllia, I trust you will keep this gesture confidential." She paused and looked at the others. "It's signed Chenar Xe, Yllone of Yllia."

"Dear me," said Laertes in the silence that followed. "I seem to have been indiscreet."

"Let me see the letter," one of the Dors said. He took the sheet and stared at it. "It's Chenar's writing all right. I'd recognize it any time."

"Something must be done," another one said. "This calls for immediate action."

The room was in an uproar. Jon Gaynor sidled up to Laertes. "You," he said accusingly, "are up to something. You never use reading glasses, so how could you have misplaced them?"

"My boy, you wound me deeply," Laertes said sadly. "But let it pass. This seems to be a matter of some import; we must not intrude with our personal squabbles."

"All right," Lemora Yno said, her voice cutting above the others. They fell silent. "Polon and Rabusa will arouse the city and see to it that the news is sent all over the planet. Rona will summon the Supreme Reviewer. The rest of us will go to the Palace of Reviews and wait for Chenar Xe to be brought in."

"What is going to happen?" Laertes asked the girl as two Ymas and a Dor left.

"Chenar Xe will be tried before the Supreme Reviewer on a charge of honesty," she said. "He will be removed from office and tomorrow there will be a special election. If you'd rather not be involved in this, Laertes—after all, Chenar will probably be unpleasant about it—you don't have to go. This letter and the chronometer are all we need to convict him."

"No," Laertes said, shaking his head. "Although I did this innocently, I did start it and I'll see it through."

"Jon?" the girl asked.

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"I want to go along and watch Laertes' innocence at work," said Jon Gaynor.

Laertes made a mental note, as they all crowded out of the room, that a small amount of *Sitta* seemed to make a great improvement in his companion.

Downstairs, they all got into a number of surface vehicles and drove off. After a short ride, they pulled up in front of a huge square building and went in.

It was all one room. In the front was a raised section on which there were a number of seats to one side and a single seat on the other side. Not far from the single seat, there was a draped box, not essentially different from theatre boxes on Terra. The rest of the room was given over to tiers of seats. There was room for hundreds of spectators.

Lemora Yno led the way up to the raised platform. "We will sit up here," she said, "since we are all complaining witnesses."

AFTER a while, Yllians began to troop into the building in small groups. Within a short time, the hall was almost filled. Then a man, wearing a gold robe over his tunic, entered the box.

"It'll soon start," Lemora said to Laertes. "Tell me, Laertes, did you frame the Yllone?"

"Me?" Laertes said.

"If you did," she said, "it was very clever of you. Dozens have tried to frame Chenar Xe without ever succeeding."

"Mmmm," Laertes said and left it at that.

There was a murmur of sound from the crowd and then Chenar Xe appeared. He was escorted by a number of Yllians whose tunics bore alternate red and yellow stripes.

Chenar Xe, Yllone of Yllia, walked a bit unsteadily. That, plus his bloodshot eyes, indicated to Laertes that the chief executive was suffering from that Terran anachronism, the hangover. But more than that was bothering him, for anger twisted his features. At the moment he looked more like a dragon, who might at any moment spit fire, than a highly evolved lizard. His anger did not lessen as he caught sight of Laertes.

As soon as the Yllone was seated in the single chair, the Yllian in the gold robe rose and started to speak. His language was a mere gibberish to Laertes and Jon. But he had spoken only a few words when someone approached the box and said something to him. He broke off, glanced briefly in the direction of Laertes and began again, this time speaking the language of the League.

"I, Krisha Ydon, Supreme Reviewer for all the Ymas and the Dors of Yllia," he said, "do now declare that a Supreme Review is about to be held in reference to the planet of Yllia versus Chenar Xe, the duly elected Yllone of Yllia, who stands before us charged with honesty. The charge may be witnessed."

Lemora Yno stood up. First she exhibited the chronometer, then she read the letter which had accompanied it.

"She witnesses truly," cried the others who sat beside Laertes and Jon.

"She has witnessed truly," declared the Supreme Reviewer. "How speaks the Yllone?"

"That Terran," the Yllone shouted angrily, jerking his hand in the direction of Laertes, "has falsely placed the curse of honesty on me. He visited me today in the guise of a friend. Since he seemed not overly observant, I promptly relieved him of a few trifling baubles. Then, noticing that he wore a garment of Ylloneal yellow, I determined that I should have it. Not wanting to wait until he went to his rooms and removed it, I invited him to drink with me and placed in his drink a traditional sleep-maker. In some unpleasant fashion, he exchanged drinks with me so that I went to sleep. Then he must have written in my hand and mailed the letter and the jewel to himself by executive order. It is admitted that he acted properly, but this does not make me guilty of honesty."

"How speaks the Terran?" asked the

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Supreme Reviewer. "Or does he choose not to speak?"

Laertes Solomon stood up, an imposing figure of a man in his multicolored clothes. "It is difficult," he said, "for one who is so new to your planet to be sure of the finer legal points. It seems to me, however, that a rather intricate problem has been brought into being. If, let us say, I did frame the Yllone as he asserts, were I to admit having done so I would then be guilty of an act of honesty myself. Were I to deny having done so—a properly dishonest stand—I would thereby rob myself of credit for a dishonest act and run the risk of being judged as having acted honestly."

HE PAUSED and there were nods of appreciation from the audience and the Supreme Reviewer. "On the other hand," continued Laertes, "if I did not frame the Yllone and I should so testify, then again I would place myself in the position of being charged with honesty. But should I admit it—the proper course in this case—then I would create a situation in which the Yllone would go unpunished for honesty and the Supreme Reviewer, in clearing the Yllone, would in turn be open to a charge of honesty. Truly a situation fraught with peril. Under the circumstances, I believe I shall content myself with the following observation upon the statement by the Yllone: There is much to what he says, but—"

There was laughter and applause as Laertes sat down.

"The deponent sayeth not," the Supreme Reviewer said with a broad grin. "The Supreme Reviewer, therefore, finds that the Yllone of Yllia, one Chenar Xe, is guilty of acting in an honest and inexcusable manner and hereby declares the office of Yllone of Yllia to be vacant. It is hereby decreed that tomorrow will be an official election day and that all candidates for the office of Yllone must file their intent, with proof of qualifications, within two hours following sunrise. Chenar Xe, the former Yllone of Yllia, is hereby sentenced to twenty-four hours in the public stocks. Would anyone speak before sentence is executed?"

Laertes was on his feet again. "I should like to take advantage of this opportunity," he said, "to anounce that I shall be a candidate for the recently vacated office. Having had some small experience in the matter, I shall endeavor to prove to you before the day is over that all of my opponents, whoever they may be, are honest men. I shall run on a platform of equal losses for all and I promise you that the Stacked Deal of Laertes Kwang Solomon will go down in League history."

There was more applause and laughter as he sat down. Chenar Xe was escorted from the building and the meeting was over.

Laertes Solomon was out early the following morning. On the way to file as a candidate for the Yllonecy, he picked the pockets of fifteen persons and then took them along as witnesses to his qualifications. As a non-citizen—a status that did not interfere with his chances of becoming the next Yllone—he was permitted to examine the ballot boxes, rather simple metal affairs some six inches square and between two and three feet long, and a sample ballot. He was then told that each candidate could request and receive one special privilege, the only reservation being that it must not be directly connected with balloting or the counting of votes. Laertes asked for the right to be the last candidate to examine the ballot boxes.

His request was immediately granted. It was considered a minor one, since all candidates had the right to examine every ballot box sometime during the day and there would be a whole stream of candidates following the sun across the planet. The other candidates were amused by Laertes' request since they knew from experience that the last one to examine the boxes was at a disadvantage. By that time they were usually so stuffed that there was little room for

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additional ballots. And the only purpose of ballot box examinations was to enable the candidate to cram in ballots marked in favor of himself.

AFTER filing, Laertes rushed back to the hotel. He planned on doing something to get a postponement of Jon's honesty test, but discovered it wasn't necessary. Lemora Yno explained that election day was a complete holiday and all other matters were forgotten until it was over.

"There's nothing more fun than elections," Lemora exclaimed. "I've spent all morning working out my guess for the pool."

"The pool?" Laertes asked.

She nodded. "Everyone guesses on the amount of votes."

"What is the population of Yllia?"

"One billion, five hundred and six million, seven hundred and twenty-three thousand, four hundred and fifty-two—but that has nothing to do with it."

"Why not?" Jon Gaynor asked in amazement.

"Everyone votes," Lemora said, "and then each candidate stuffs the boxes with votes for himself. At the last election there were twenty billion votes counted."

Jon Gaynor turned away in disgust and Laertes chuckled. "Personally," he said, "I predict a light vote." He refused to explain his cryptic pronouncement and shortly thereafter he vanished.

It was early afternoon before Laertes appeared again. He seemed to be in fine humor. When he arrived at the hotel, he was carrying a long box something like a violin case. He produced from it an Yllian musical instrument. It was four-sided, with strings on all sides, and the player had to revolve it to desired positions, meanwhile scraping a bow across the strings.

To the amusement of Lemora and Jon, Laertes insisted on going out and playing the instrument upon street corners as a prelude to making a political speech. It was only occasionally that he accidentally hit upon anything even remotely resembling a tune, but he kept at it with a dogged persistence. The Yllians found his antics highly amusing and before long the political commentators were telling the planet about it. Soon thereafter vistascreens all over the planet were showing the flamboyant figure of Laertes Kwang Solomon sawing away on the strings of the *trotone* or trotting along with the case swinging in his hand.

This continued until it was time for Laertes to begin his examination of the precincts. Jon Gaynor had taken it for granted that he would pilot Laertes over the planet, but when the time came Laertes announced loftily that he had already made other plans. He refused to let either Jon or Lemora accompany him. He waved to them and left, jauntily swinging his *trotone* case.

As had the other candidates earlier, Laertes flew madly from Yllian city to Yllian city, examining the ballot boxes in every precinct. Watching the vistascreen, Jon and Lemora caught several glimpses of him as he hurried in and out of precincts, the *trotone* case still clutched in his hand.

As the sun once more rose to shine on the city of Yma Dor, Laertes returned to the spot from which he'd started. Like everyone else on Yllia, Jon Gaynor and Lemora Yno had stayed up to watch the election returns, so they were in the suite to welcome Laertes.

"You're so far ahead," Lemora cried, "I'm sure that you will be the next Yllone."

"In fact, you're the only one in the running," Jon said.

"Thank you, children," Laertes said benevolently. "I hate to sound stuffy, but I knew it all the time."

Lemora frowned. "I don't understand it, Laertes. The other candidates were all around putting their votes for themselves in the ballot boxes before you got there. How were you able to get their votes out and your own in?"

"For the record, I shall insist that my

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opponents obviously recognized that I was the better man." Laertes chuckled. "But just between us girls I'll admit that I owe it all to my belated interest in Yllian music."

"Music?" exclaimed Jon.

"You mean the *trotone?*" Lemora asked.

LAERTES nodded. "The idea of stuffing ballot boxes also occurred to the people of Terra many centuries ago. I've always thought it a rather inefficient method, but this was my first chance to try out a variation. You see I didn't bother to stuff any boxes. Instead, I found a clever craftsman who made me duplicates of the ballot boxes. On my inspections, I merely switched the boxes."

"But what did the music have to do with it?" Jon asked.

"It helped everyone to get used to the idea of the crazy Terran who insisted on playing a *trotone,*" Laertes said with a grin. "Then I threw the *trotone* away and used the case to switch the boxes. A ballot box just fits into a *trotone* case."

"And now," said a voice from the vistascreen, "we will show you the final tabulation on the Yllian special election."

The three of them moved around to where they could see the screen. In a moment the figures were flashed on it.

FINAL RESULTS OF THE SPECIAL ELECTION

Laertes Kwang Solomon	1,506,723,452
Nicholas Samoti	1
Other candidates	0

"There are several unusual features about this election," continued the voice from the screen, "but perhaps one of the most baffling is the one vote for a Nicholas Samoti. Not only was there no candidate by that name, but the name is completely unknown on Yllia. . . ."

Laertes chuckled as he switched off the vistascreen.

"The number of your votes," Jon Gaynor said accusingly, "is exactly the same as the population of Yllia. So what was the idea of one vote, which doesn't exist, for President Samoti, of the League?"

Laertes chuckled again. "I thought it might be wise to show at least one vote more than exists on the planet so no one could claim it was an honest election and maybe throw the results out. And since Yllian elections are openly crooked, it seemed only fitting that Samoti ought to get at least one vote."

With that, the new chief executive of Yllia went into the next room and fell asleep.

VI

SHORTLY after lunch, Laertes Kwang Solomon, newly elected Yllone of Yllia, awakened. Having already anticipated his election, he had obtained a selection of yellow tunics. After his shower he put one on and viewed himself in a mirror. The result was a little like a tent in a high wind, but Laertes beamed with approval at his image.

Downtown, in the executive offices, Yllone Solomon's first act was to appoint a new Cheelom. He appointed the craftsman who'd made the ballot boxes, the Yllian who had flown him and his ballot boxes around the planet, and Lemora Yno. After that, he leafed through an Yllian registry book and picked ninety-seven more at random. Then he issued an order for an immediate meeting of the Cheelom.

By the time the freshly-appointed Cheelomyl arrived in the conference hall, Laertes was already waiting for them. He was seated in the Yllone-chair, holding a legal-looking paper in duplicate.

"I have called you together," he said when they were all gathered, "in order that we might get acquainted, but also in order that you may pass the first law under the new regime. I have the new law here, in duplicate. I will give you the general idea of it, but you may each read it more thoroughly when I pass among you to have you sign it. As you

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know, in the past, the Yllone has always forced the members of the Cheelom to share all graft they collect. The first law under the new regime is one which states that in the future any graft you get is entirely your own." He paused and looked at the faces before him. It was easy to tell what most of them were thinking. They were torn between the thought of getting to keep all their graft and the idea that this might be construed as an act of honesty, thereby making another special election possible.

He went gravely down among them, carefully holding the paper while each of them read it and then signed both copies. He happily ignored the fact that what few valuables he was carrying were soon lifted.

When the last of the hundred members had signed, Laertes returned to the front of the room. There was just a touch of the wolfish in the smile he turned upon them.

"As Yllone of Yllia," he said, "I hereby declare that which you signed to be legally incorporated into the Yllian laws. Anyone want to say anything?"

Lemora Yno stood up, indecision on her face. "I should have said this before, but it is possible that someone might interpret that as an honest move on your part."

Laertes beamed at her. "Bless you, girl," he said. "I was expecting one of these other characters to get up and fling the charge in my face. But it won't hold water." He separated the two sheets of paper and threw the carbon on the floor. "The first paper you all signed was the law exactly as I explained it and read it. The one which appeared to be the carbon, however, is actually a revised edition of the law. In the later, and important, version, in return for this consideration each of you have agreed to pay me seventy-five per cent of your accumulated wealth of the moment, and seventy-five per cent of everything you make in the future aside from the graft of your office."

There was a moment of stunned silence. When it finally was digested, their appreciation of his cleverness was tempered by a certain reluctance.

"It also states," Laertes said, "that the first installment is to be paid to me within one hour after the passage of the law. Which means one hour from now. If you'd care to stop by on your way out and examine the document, it will be quite all right."

ONE by one, they trooped past him, looked at the paper and went on their way. Many a face was slightly paler than normal.

Laertes returned to his office. When he entered, it was to find Jon Gaynor pacing up and down in front of his desk.

"Well, Jon," he said, "this is a pleasant surprise. What can I do for you?"

"What I want to know," Jon said, "is what you're going to do?"

"Well, let me see," Laertes said reflectively. "I had thought to spend the next hour checking the general situation. At that time I expect to meet with my Cheelom to accept certain tributes from them. After that—"

"I mean," Jon interrupted, "what are you going to do about the Galactic League?"

"I'll probably get around to them soon. First, I have to mend my political fences—I believe that's the proper expression."

"That's what I thought," Jon said grimly. "You have no intention of carrying out the instructions of the League. You've gotten yourself a lot of power and the chance to steal and carry on in the immoral fashion of a barbarian. Now that you've been elected president of this planet, you could use your power to force it into a friendly relationship with the League. You could make them return the diamonds they stole. You could change the ridiculous laws they have now and turn them into a law-abiding, respectable people. I demand that you do it."

"Look, son," Laertes said, "you can't legislate a new pattern of behavior into existence. The history of the League and

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of Terra is filled with unsuccessful attempts to do that. I haven't forgotten the League, but this has to be worked out in the proper way. Now, you stop getting yourself in an uproar and leave everything to the old professor."

"I consider," Jon Gaynor said stiffly, "that your actions have released me from the obligation to obey your commands. I shall now report to my proper superiors and act according to their instructions. Good day, sir." He turned and marched out of the office, slamming the door behind him.

Laertes sighed heavily and reached for the button on his desk. "Tell me, son," he said to the young Yma who answered the ring, "do we have any cops around?"

"Cops?"

"Yeah. Do we have a police force—you know, somebody we can send out to arrest somebody?"

The Yma's face cleared with understanding. "Oh, yes. They are called the *Ganavim*. If you wish to be certain that they will bring in the prisoner, it is best to offer them a substantial bribe since the prisoner is apt to buy his freedom."

"Tell them we'll double any offer they get," Laertes said. "The young man who just left here is undoubtedly headed for the spaceport with the idea of communicating with the Galactic League. Have him arrested on a charge of honesty and held for a personal executive examination."

THE YMA nodded and left. During the next hour, Laertes busied himself with drawing a crude blueprint and writing out detailed instructions. The final results were turned over to a local craftsman he summoned. Then he went back to the meeting room.

The members of the Cheelom trooped in and each deposited his assessed wealth before Laertes. It was mostly in the form of cash or gems. The pile grew steadily and impressively. Laertes picked up a handful of diamonds.

"Do any of these stones come from Yllia?" he asked. "Or are they all part of loot from somewhere else?"

"They are not of here," one of the men said. "We do not know if there are any stones here, since we have no machinery to find them. It is easier to take them from others."

Laertes nodded. "This," he said, indicating the money and stones they had brought, "is the first step in what might be called the Solomon Adult Education Project. Tell me, aside from this picking of each other's pockets, what is the most profitable racket you've worked on the outside?"

After some hesitation, an old Dor rose. "I believe the money making boxes have done the best. We've sold them throughout the galaxy. Wherever there is a culture sufficiently advanced to use a medium of exchange, we've been able to sell those."

"What's the most profitable fraud you can remember?"

The old Dor thought a moment. "We sold a money-making box to the *Barjon* of Blayt—what you'd call Polaris—for a *tremon* of stones. By your reckoning that would be the equivalent of one million credits."

"I presume," Laertes said, "that this was considered very clever?"

"We have defrauded a thousand star systems," the Dor boasted. "There are none in the universe who are more clever than we are."

"I've got news for you," Laertes said. He glared at them. "You're a bunch of pikers. The best that any of you can do is maybe steal a few units from a blind man. Compared with some other cultures, or with what you could do, you're such a bunch of pikers that you're practically honest."

There was a moment of stunned silence. "You have no right to talk to us that way," the old Dor said angrily.

"I have every right," snarled Laertes. "You're a pack of petty pilferers who couldn't steal your grandmother's hearing aid unless she was asleep. But from now on things are going to be different.

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I want six volunteers to make a trip with me. But they've got to agree not to pick a single pocket, or even to so much as blink, unless I tell them it's all right. Now, who wants to smarten up?"

"What is the plan?" one of them asked.

"We're going to the city of New Europa on Procyon," Laertes said. "That's all you need to know. You'll learn the rest as we go along."

Two days later, Laertes Solomon, accompanied by three Ymas and three Dors, landed in New Europa. Laertes, in keeping with the idea that he was a fugitive from the League, wore a flowing false mustache and a pair of huge gold ear-rings. He wore his Yllian tunic and the overall affect was awe-inspiring. He was having the time of his life.

They took over the largest suite in the Solarian Hotel. Under the guidance of Laertes, they began a flurry of activity. They registered themselves as the Aldebaran Trust, permitted to do business subject to the restrictions imposed on unaffiliated systems. They leased a large factory on the third level of New Europa, placed large orders for various League metals, and discussed the terms of a labor contract.

At first, the Yllians were nervous, but Laertes assured them that only a few top officials knew about the robbery of the League freighter and the disastrous display of force by the League warship. Since this was unknown to even the majority of business men, they would be regarded as any other visiting entrepeneurs. He was sure that the government would have a wary eye out, but it would make no move except as indicated by the Trusts as long as their activity was confined to commerce.

ON THE fourth day, Laertes signed a contract with the Captive Audience Trust for a series of visiads giving advance publicity to the Handy Little Pocket Diamond Maker. The ads were to start that same day. Then Laertes sat back to wait.

He didn't have to wait long. The following day, there was a knock on the door of the suite. When Laertes opened it, there were three Terran men standing outside. They looked prosperous and assured.

"We," said one of them, "would like to see the head of the Aldebaran Trust. I am Winston Valencia, of the League Diamond Trust. This is José Murphy, our Public Relations Counselor, and Franklin Nedici, our Trusts Relations Counselor."

"I am the Yllone of the Aldebaran System," Laertes said. He was using what he fondly hoped was an otherworldly accent, but in reality sounded the way the popular visicomedy stars imagined aliens talked. "What you would call the President. You may address me as Your Excellency." He held the door open and bowed them in.

"Your Excellency," said Winston Valencia, "we understand that you are about to start marketing something which you call the Handy Little Pocket Diamond Maker. Right, men?"

"Right," the two men with him echoed.

"That is correct," Laertes said. "At this moment, you understand, we have only the model and our blue prints, but we expect to start production as soon as our labor contracts are signed. We also expect to put out a Large Economy Size Diamond Maker."

"We would like to see a demonstration of your product," Winston Valencia said. "Being in the diamond business, we are naturally interested in your product."

"Very interested," chorused Murphy and Nedici.

"I believe it might be arranged," Laertes said. He retired to another room in the suite and soon returned with two objects. One vaguely resembled a jet-gun in its general outlines. The other was a small black box. Laertes extended the box.

"You will please to examine the allotropic chamber," he said.

The three men took the box and ex-

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amined it carefully. They peered into the empty interior, they tapped the thin wooden walls, they pulled and prodded. They pried at the small hole in one end.

"Looks like a plain wooden box to me," said Valencia.

"Exactly," said Murphy and Nedici.

"It is," Laertes said cheerfully. "The wood has, however, been treated with a special formula known only in our system." He took the box and set it on the table in front of them. He extended the gun-like object. "The carbon-derringer," he said.

They took it and once more went through their intensive examination.

"A complex mechanism," Valencia said cautiously.

"Intricate," agreed Murphy and Nedici.

"Leaving out the patented aspects," Laertes said, "the Handy Little Pocket Diamond Maker—no home is complete without one—operates on what might be called a reverse of Carnot's Cycle, the four steps in the cycle being null-isothermal, null-adiabatic, null-isothermal compression, and null-adiabatic compression." He picked up the gun and inserted the nose into the hole in the end of the box. As he pulled the trigger, a series of soft explosions could be heard within the box. "This operation extracts carbon from the air about us and converts it to its natural crystalline allotropic form and the final product possesses the highest possible refractive index and dispersive power. It is, in other words, what you prefer to call diamonds."

HE REMOVED the gun and gestured toward the box. Valencia picked it up and flipped open the lid. He tilted the box and a dozen large diamonds rolled out into his hand. Even to the naked eye, they were finer than any stones to be found within the League.

"You may keep those," Laertes said generously. "As you can see, the cost of producing them is negligible."

"Would you mind demonstrating it once more?" Valencia asked.

"Once more," Murphy and Nedici agreed.

"Not at all," Laertes said politely. He picked up the now-empty box and again inserted the gun. This time he depressed the trigger for only a moment. Then he removed the gun and handed the box to the Terran. Three more large diamonds rolled into his hand from the box.

The three men exchanged glances. Valencia cleared his throat. "Your Excellency," he said, "we realize that you are a stranger to the Galactic League—although you yourself look very much like a Terran—and are therefore unfamiliar with our business practices. We are very much afraid that your contemplated enterprise constitutes a definite infringement on the rights of the Diamond Trust."

"A clear cut case of ad valorem, arcana imperii, casus belli, cave canem, cui bono, and de facto est disputandum," said Murphy.

"Not to mention ex pede Herculem, facile princeps, and facilis est descensus Averni," Nedici contributed eagerly.

"Sounds more like anguis in herba to me," Laertes muttered under his breath.

"Your Excellency said something?" Valencia asked.

"Merely recalling an old Aldebaran proverb about the type of life in our native grass," Laertes said politely. "What means this learned talk? Does it have reference to our business?"

"I'm afraid so," Valencia said. "We could, of course, immediately charge infringement before the League Congress and I have no doubt they would uphold us. Or we could take other steps to stop you."

"The public would never buy un-Galactic products, chief," Murphy said.

"The Interlocking Boards of Trusts see eye-to-eye with us, chief," said Nedici.

"We'll appeal this outrage," Laertes said angrily. "We'll sue. We'll declare war. We'll—"

"Now, now," Valencia interrupted

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soothingly. "Let's not go off half-jetted, Your Excellency. Perhaps we could settle this by the Diamond Trust merely taking over your models and blueprints for a token sum. Say, perhaps, one million credits."

"Ten million credits," Laertes said promptly.

Valencia frowned. "One million, five. That's my final offer."

"Not a credit more," chorused Murphy and Nedici.

"Nine million, nine," countered Laertes.

They haggled for another few minutes and finally agreed upon a payment of five million credits. Winston Valencia wrote out a sight draft for that amount and Laertes handed over the gun, the box, and an impressive roll of blueprints. He showed the three men to the door and bid them a fond goodbye.

The six Yllians were grinning broadly as Laertes turned back to them. "You are a rare Yllone," one of them said. "Five million Galactic credits on one trip. Never have we had an Yllone capable of so bold a stroke."

"It was nothing," grunted Laertes. "This was merely another version of your money-making box."

"But how did the diamonds get in the box?" one of them asked. "I failed to detect anything."

"On the first one, I switched boxes while they were examining the gun. For the second production, I palmed the diamonds into the box as I picked it up. Now, I want one of you to run out and cash this sight draft. Senula Di."

The Dor stepped up and took the draft. "Then we will leave quickly?" he asked.

"Leave?" Laertes said. "Not at all."

"Not leave?" exclaimed one of the Yma. "But they will soon discover that they can't make diamonds and they will return demanding their money."

"Exactly," Laertes said. "I told you that all of you were a bunch of pikers. You watch the old professor and you'll learn a thing or two."

He would tell them no more. Senula Di returned with the cash from the draft and Laertes tucked it away. Then he permitted them to open a few bottles of the *Sitta* they'd brought with them and the evening quickly passed.

IT WAS about noon the following day when again there was a knock on the door. Laertes opened it. The three men were once more there. They all looked a bit surprised to see Laertes.

"Come in," Laertes exclaimed, holding the door open. "It's always a pleasure to see men of such sound business judgment."

The three trooped in, all of them looking grim.

"We are men of few words," Valencia said. "We will come to the point. We used the Diamond Maker exactly as you demonstrated yesterday but when we opened the box it contained nothing but water. Right, men?"

"Right, chief," Murphy and Nedici said.

"Watered stock, eh?" Laertes said jovially. "You must have jarred the gun in moving it so that it extracted hydrogen from the air instead of carbon. A slip of the elements, as it were, I expect."

"Your Excellency," Valencia said firmly, "we believe that it was never meant to work. We believe that you deliberately defrauded us of five million credits. This is a serious matter."

"Very grave," agreed Murphy and Nedici.

"Unless," continued Valencia, "you are prepared to immediately return our five million credits, we shall have you arrested."

"Immediately," said Murphy and Nedici.

Laertes Solomon grinned his most rafish grin. "I believe," he said, "that this is the first crime—if it can be called that—in the Galactic League in more than five hundred years. Is that correct?"

Winston Valencia nodded. "And

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you'll pay for it," he said.

"I doubt it very much," Laertes said gently. "I believe you may have overlooked one or two matters. I'm afraid it would do your public reputation considerable damage if the story of this got out. People would laugh at the way the great Diamond Trust was taken. They might even begin to feel that it's a mistake to rely on the judgment of men who can be fooled into buying a diamond making machine."

Winston Valencia glanced at his Public Relations Counselor.

"There is no precedent, chief," José Murphy said, uncomfortable at being called upon to contribute more than an assent. "But it might cause some ill-will at that. Hard to say how the public will act where there's been no conditioning."

"Furthermore," Laertes said sweetly, "should this story get about, the other Trusts might get the idea you're slipping. If that should happen, they'd surely decide to take you over."

"Nedici," barked Valencia.

The Trusts Relations Counselor was equally ill at ease. "They might at that, chief," he mumbled. "They *could* interpret it that way. And you remember last month Van Daavers jokingly said he didn't see why the Chemical Trust didn't take us over. Maybe he wasn't joking."

Winston Valencia glared at Laertes.

"And," said the latter, "there is the fact that you also still possess a number of diamonds of mine. Since they are much finer than any stones in the League, and as you've undoubtedly noticed, perfectly matched, they are easily worth more than five million credits. So we cannot be accused of taking financial advantage of you. On the contrary. . . ."

Winston Valencia struggled with himself and apparently reached a decision. His face contorted painfully and a sound issued. It was weak, but it was obvioulv meant to be a laugh. "Suppose we just call the whole family a pleasant little joke among friends and forget it," he said hopefully. "In fact, I'll return your diamonds and let you keep the five million credits—if you'll tell me where these diamonds came from."

"I brought them here from the third planet in Aldebaran." Laertes said truthfully, neglecting to add that before that they had come from some far-flung section of the galaxy. He reached out his hand. "Give."

Winston Valencia reluctantly produced the diamonds and handed them over. "Then we'll forget about the other matter?" he asked.

"Maybe," Laertes said. "We are also prepared, for the consideration of twenty million credits, to grant you exclusive foreign rights to diamond mining on the five planets in the Aldebaran system. It is to be understood, however, that you will also recognize the rights of the Aldebaran Trust to dispose of its exports throughout the League in keeping with fair trade practices."

"Both rights to be subject to the standard business practices established by the League?" Valencia asked. He was obviously interested, even eager.

"Yes," said Laertes. "We are applying for admission to the League, but until we are admitted you understand that there will be a special tax of twenty-five per cent assessed on our planet. Once we are admitted to the League, the tax will be cancelled."

Winston Valencia put in a hurried call to his offices and within a few minutes a dozen more of his bright young men were there. They drew up an agreement which Valencia and Laertes signed. Then Valencia gave Laertes a sight draft for twenty million credits and sailed happily out.

"Just remember," Laertes told the happy Yllians,, "that this money belongs to the government of Yllia and the five million credits belong to me since they were realized from my diamonds."

Within the next two weeks, using almost identical methods, Laertes ar-

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rived at trade agreements with the Food Trust, the Textile & Plastic Trust, the Toy Trust, the Building Trust, the Cosmetic Trust, the Space Flight Trust, the Chemical Trust, the Synthetics Trust and the Anti-Fertility Trust.

The following day, Laertes, still resplendent in false mustache, gold earrings and yellow tunic, held a conference with the New Planets Sub-Committee of the Galactic League of Planets Congress. Inasmuch as every member of the sub-committee owed his political life to one or more of the Trusts, there was little trouble concerning the possible admission of Aldebaran as the tenth system in the League. True, there was some resistance from the Solar representatives when Laertes demanded proportional representation, but it didn't last long. The representatives from the other eight systems finally saw their chance and threw their weight behind Laertes.

The matter was finally debated a full day in Congress. The Trusts were eager to avoid a twenty-five per cent taxation, so Sol finally capitulated, banking on their control of committees to make up for the loss of power in the general membership of Congress.

It was agreed that Aldebaran would be admitted, subject only to a committee review of the Aldebaran constitution and laws.

Just three weeks from the day he'd left, Laertes Kwang Solomon, Yllone of Yllia, led his six-Yllian crew back to the planet in triumph.

VII

BACK in the city of Yma Dor, Laertes went immediately to the executive building and issued an order for a meeting of the Cheelom. When Lemora Yno arrived, he drew her to one side and talked quietly to her for a good ten minutes. Half way through, she began smiling happily and she left as soon as he'd finished.

When the Cheelom was gathered, Laertes called on the six who had gone with him to report. They each gave a glowing account of Laertes' efforts and at the end of their talks, the two hundred million credits were displayed. The ovation lasted a full thirty minutes.

"The first lesson," Laertes said, when he finally got up to speak, "is never to steal a wallet when you can steal two hundred million credits. The second part of it is never to break the laws of another country in order to steal, when you can get just as much without breaking any law."

The sight of the two hundred million credits, more by far than any raiding party had ever brought back before, was enough to make them give him wide-eyed attention.

"The trusts of the Galactic League," said Laertes, "will rake in as much in a day as you can in a year. Even what we've taken is nothing to them. So the second lesson is to make yourselves over in the image of the Galactic League. We've already set up the Aldebaran Trust to operate there. You can next set up a number of smaller Trusts here to operate through that one. If you must, you can even use them to cheat yourselves in a big way—but if you're smart you'll work together."

"But what will we trade through the Aldebaran Trust?" someone asked. "According to the agreements you made, they will have the right to do everything. Besides we have no tools."

Laertes grinned. "You'll build up the same way they did. Within a few weeks, the League Trusts will be arriving here. They'll bring in all their modern machinery. By that time, this system will be admitted to the League, so they will have to file patents for everything here. Then you'll find some reason to declare war against the home planets of the Trusts. As soon as the State of War is declared, you can rightfully grab all patents. But you don't have to worry about fighting. The war will be settled by negotiation in Congress, but by that time you will have examined all the

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patents. Then you build your own machinery.

"By the way, shortly after you're admitted to the League, somebody will be nosing around to find out how you touched off the bomb just after it left a League warship. How was it done?"

It was Senula Di who answered. "As soon as we knew they were there, we merely sent up a small one man ship to hover directly beneath the bomb bay. The bomb dropped a few feet and struck the ship and that was all."

Laertes chuckled. "Never tell them that. Pretend that there must have been a flaw in the bomb. Insist enough and you'll partly convince them, but they'll never be able to be sure you don't have a secret weapon and it'll be that much extra insurance.

"I'll give you a number of briefings on other business practices before I leave, but now a few words on the political aspect. Before we leave here today, we must draft a new constitution and a whole new set of laws. Hereafter, honesty is the best policy and dishonesty is illegal, just like in the League. If some of you still want to pick a few pockets for fun, go ahead but remember that it's illegal.

"No more stuffing of ballot boxes. It isn't even necessary. Best have two political parties. That's what the League has and they'll think you're pretty smart to have thought of the same thing. You've got the perfect set-up anyway. One party can be the Yma and the other the Dor. The Yma will contend that the Dor Party is inhuman and bestial. The Dor will claim that the Yma Party is un-lizardlike and overly refined. Except for those two points, both parties will stand for the same thing, so it makes no difference who is elected. Got all that?"

Ninety-nine voices shouted that they did.

"Now, let's get to work," Laertes said.

The Cheelomyl filed out of the meeting talking animatedly.

SOME two hours later, they had finished drafting the new laws. One of the first laws incorporated the other four planets into the Yllian government; thereafter everything aplied to the entire system. Laertes gave orders for it to be properly printed and for one copy to be flown to New Europa, Procyon, Galactic League of Planets.

"Now," he said, "I think a small celebration might be in order. I believe that all of us can get into my suite at the hotel. I suggest that we go there and relax over a few cases of *Sitta*."

No one seemed to have any objections to this.

"This is a moment of some sentimental importance to me," Laertes said, dabbing at an imaginary tear. "I should like to have a souvenir of the occasion. I realize that you use cameras for your vistascreens, but I wonder if you have a photographer who might take a picture of our little gathering?"

"My second cousin's nephew," said Senula Di, "is one of the finest four-sense photographers in Yllia."

"Four-sense photographer?" Laertes asked.

"Not only are the pictures three dimensional to sight and touch, but they give off appropriate subtle perfumes, and the sounds are recorded on the frame."

"Excellent," said Laertes. "We will pick up your cousin's nephew on the way to the hotel."

Not much later, one hundred Yllians and one Terran stopped in front of the best suite of the Yllian Palace Hotel. The photographer was in the lead with Laertes.

"My companion and friend," said Laertes, poised with key in hand, "will be here awaiting my arrival. I have not seen him since my return to Yllia, so he will be overjoyed to see me. I wonder if you might be ready to take a picture the minute I open the door?"

The phtographer nodded and quickly set up his rather elaborate equipment. When he was finally ready, he signaled

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Laertes. The latter quietly unlocked the door and threw it open. The photographer took the picture before any of them quite realized what they saw.

Laertes Solomon did a double-take and realized that things had worked out even better than he planned. Inside the room, there was a soft feminine giggle. Then Jon Gaynor shouted.

"Get the hell out of here," he said.

Laertes closed the door gently. "It reminds me of the time the dean's daughter stayed after class to ask me some trivial question," he said. "But perhaps we should retire to some spot where I can tell you the story over a glass of *Sitta*." He sighed as he turned away from the door. "I've often wondered what she had intended asking me. . . ."

VIII

THE NIGHT before had been a rugged one. Laertes Solomon had imbibed his full share of *Sitta* and sometime shortly before dawn he had staggered back to the hotel, in the company of two Yllians, singing, "She was only a Spaceman's daughter, but she knew her Fitzgerald-Lorentz." He had fumbled his way through the darkened suite to the far room where he had fallen asleep without even removing his tunic.

Manfully trying to ignore his hangover, Laertes got up and took a quick shower. He put on a fresh tunic and transferred his few properties from the other, finding a small bottle of *Sitta* in so doing. Holding his breath, he managed a drink from the bottle and felt somewhat better. He went into the next room where he found Jon Gaynor. Alone.

"You should know better," Jon said. "At your age."

Laertes was on the point of a sharp rejoinder when he noticed the ice pack which the young Terran was holding to his brow.

"You, too?" he asked.

"Me, too," Jon said. He didn't even sound sheepish.

"Try this," Laertes said, holding out the bottle.

Jon took the bottle and emptied it. In a few seconds, a little color returned to his cheeks.

"I hate to say this," Laertes said, "when you're obviously at low ebb, but I'm afraid you're in a bad way, son. I take it you broke out of jail last night. Possibly with the aid of Lemora Yno."

"I did," Jon Gaynor said calmly. "But I thought that was the accepted thing on Yllia."

"Times have changed," Laertes said. "By the time you broke out last night, it was as illegal as if you had done it on Terra. Then there is the matter of last night."

"What of it?"

"I am in sympathy with the situation myself," Laertes said. "But it involved a type of activity which is frowned upon back in the League except under certain rather restricted circumstances. I'm afraid you may have to do the right thing by the girl."

"Lemora and I intend to be married as soon as we can reach Terra," Jon said.

Laertes lifted an eyebrow. "Interesting. Still there is the question of the picture which was taken last night. The photographer was all for using it to blackmail you, but I convinced him that it wasn't quite the right thing. Still, as long as that negative is in existence, you won't be exactly safe even though married."

"You mean this negative?" Jon asked, holding it up.

"Where the hell did you get that?" roared Laertes.

Jon grinned. "I lifted it from you last night as you staggered through on your way to bed."

Laertes glared at him for a moment, then began to chuckle. Jon Gaynor's voice joined it and the two sat there laughing at each other.

To weeks later, Laertes Kwang Solomon, Yllone of Yllia, Retired, once more attired in his rainbow-hued suit, stood stiffly at attention to witness the formal

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marriage between Sergeant Jon Gaynor and Lemora Yno, of Yllia. It was taking place on Terra and there was a large crowd, mostly lured by the beauty of the bride. Under the circumstances, Laertes thought that Jon was not giving quite enough attention to the ceremony. Instead, he seemed to be twisting and contorting as though he'd suddenly developed a case of Mercurian hives. Laertes cleared his throat a number of times, but Jon paid no attention.

Only when the ceremony was over, and the bride and groom were about to step into Jon's waiting ship, did Laertes learn the reason for the peculiar contortions. The bridgroom, with a triumphant leer, suddenly waved to Laertes. The object in his hand was definitely an intimate garment but recently detached from the bride. At the same moment that young lady clutched with sudden awareness at her middle and blushed a beautiful aquamarine.

Laertes was still chuckling a couple of hours later when he arrived back on Mars. Taking the air-shuttle to his home, he was put in further good humor by the visinews. "Aldebaran," announced the commentator, "has declared war on Sol, Procyon, Altair and Vega."

WHEN Laertes arrived home he found a visitor waiting to see him. It was Nicholas Samoti, President of the Galactic League, holding a worn book.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Solomon," he said. He extended the book. "I believe that this takes care of certain matters between us."

Laertes took the book and glanced at it eagerly. "This is it," he said. "I trust you were satisfied."

"Satisfied is hardly the word," President Samoti said dryly. "If I were to make a comment, it would be that you did your job too well."

"Too well," snorted Laertes.

"Yes. True, we did want some sort of peaceful settlement, but the loss of Sol's majority in Congress and the nature of the trade agreements were a little more than we bargained for. I might add that the recent declaration of war by Aldebaran smacks of an unusual precocity—or perhaps of unusual guidance."

Laertes chuckled.

"The matter did get out of hand, however," President Samoti said, "and since we couldn't stop it, there is no point in complaining. I notice, however, that you are still an officer and a stockholder in the Aldebaran Trust."

"That's right," Laertes said.

"We would like you to resign your position and give up your stock."

"Why?" demanded Laertes. A sly look came into his eyes. "I can't expect the university to keep me on forever. That is merely a little insurance against the advancing years. You wouldn't ask an old man to give up his security?"

President Samoti sighed heavily. "We feel," he said, "that the Aldebarans will make enough inroads against our Trusts without your assistance. And we feel that giving such assistance would take you from other more valuable duties."

"What other duties?"

The League President had the air of a man who knew when he was licked and would always make the best of it. "In the expanding galaxy which we will face in the future," he said, "we realize that there will be many problems which on the face of it seem impossible, but can be resolved by the proper man. We have just established a new League department to be known as the Bureau of Impossible Events. We want you to head it—with a life-time contract, of course, and, I might say, a handsome stipend."

Laertes struggled slightly. He'd been entranced by the idea of being a thorn in the side of the Trusts, but it was a vision which didn't have a chance beside the new offering.

"I'll accept," he said with dignity. "Now, get the hell out. I have important work to do." He opened the first few yellowed pages and began to read.

"The mental features discoursed of as the analytical, are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis. . . ."

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

On earth we are tied to a piece-meal view of the Milky Way, with the corona outside and the constellation Sagittarius in toward the center. It's a little like a man in a basement looking up through a grating at the passing legs of people and trying to judge what they are like from their shoes.

But out in space there is another spiral galaxy—the Great Nebula of Andromeda, which is believed to resemble our Milky Way quite closely.

Astronomers have photographed tremendous hot blue stars and bright red stars in it and by comparing it with our own, have observed certain characteristics common to both. There are two more galaxies visible from Earth, though not from the United States—these are the Magellanic Clouds. The Small Cloud and the Large Cloud form a triple system with our own Milky Way. And since their characteristics are similar, is it too far-fetched to believe that somewhere among these billions of suns there will be planets like Earth, on which life may have developed?

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

THE above sub-head is probably the classic understatement of all time. Letters they call them? Hah.

Lay on, MacDuff.

THE SIMPLE LIFE
by Paul Mittelbuscher

Dear Ed: Once more the pages of TWS's letter column echo to the sounds of the multitude of fen who wish to give vent to their own personal beliefs in religion. Being a mild-mannered BEM I choose to keep my peace.

I wonder how many fans noticed the letter in the latest AS praising editor Browne for publishing JOURNEY TO BARKUT. Methinks somebody is slightly confused.

To the recent improvement in the art department, Hallelujah! But you can advance one step more by banishing Orban to outer Mongolia or some other strange exotic place (like Brooklyn.) As far as I'm concerned, Alex Schomburg can illustrate *everything* (including the ad for the rupture easer.) This boy is *great*. It's surprising the fen aren't more appreciative of his work. Schomburg is rapidly becoming my favorite artist.

As to Gregg Calkins, one big raspberry. "Friend (and I use that term very loosely) Madge is *not* one of the three worst mags."

Now a gripe at you, Ed, must we have so much Vance? Jack has talent but you're overworking the boy. How about some material from Poul Anderson, Walter M. Miller Jr. and Stan Mullen.

Would any fen in Missouri interested in forming a statewide fan club get in touch with me. And congrats to Marion Mallinger for a fine letter in October Reader Speaks. Wish I was intelligent. Are you male or female, Marion? —*Sweet Springs, Missouri.*

We don't mind *too much* when somebody else gets credit for printing a story like JOURNEY TO BARKUT. 'Course it would be nice to have the credit go where it belongs, but as long as somebody recognizes a good story when they see it, that's still better than nothing, said he magnanimously.

Oom Paul, we regret to say we discern a faint smell of bias about your more positive statements. Too much Vance you say. But Schomburg can illustrate *everything*. Fie on you, lad. Are you after shoving your likes and dislikes down everyone else's throat? And just because we happen to agree with you (on Schomburg, not Vance) don't think you can quote us.

A BREAK IN THE MONOTONY
by Barbara Yoacham

Dear Sam: I'm an ardent fan and when each new issue comes out I buy it, bring it home, find a quiet, comfortable spot, sit down and read it from cover to cover. And different though I may be, I feel you put out a well-balanced magazine. You have a lemon once in a while, but who's perfect? In this issue BIRD OF TIME was—um—can't seem to find a nice enough word. THE REASONABLE PEOPLE and FOOL'S ERRAND could have been better. But they read good just the same.

You're in for it. I'm palling up with Marian Cox on that male-on-the-cover business. (Marian, are ya listening? How about ganging up on him? If we drag him between us we might turn the trick.) Why not put some handsome males on the covers? You had a male this issue but I'd need the BEM's microscope to see if he was good-looking and with that hot light on him he needs a shirt yet? Besides, you put plunging necklines on the women, etc., and him up to his neck in clothes. 'Tain't fair, I say, just ain't fair.

I too have felt I'm the only brave one in buying s. f. I know no one else who reads it and I've yet to see anyone buying a magazine plus the fact that the dealer always gives me a "at least these nit-wits break the monotony" look.

Give Joe Gibson a hug or something for me, will you? Being happily married I can't and he should have a reward. How seldon it is a man can see a female's side of something. Rare, that's what he is, rare. Joe, Marian and I are all for some good-looking men, not too heavily clothed. That ought

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to make history.—*Bldg. 6, Apt. A. Vet's Housing, Healdsburg, Cal.*

P.S. I live in a Quonset hut, so if my letter skips and jumps and I appear to be an idiot, live in a house with no ceilings or walls for six months. It does something to you. I can still read, though, and I can still enjoy your mag—minus your covers, that is.

If you want any hugs delivered to Joe Gibson, you'll have to get permission from your husband to deliver them personally. Don't think Joe would care for it from me and vice versa. Or don't you know about these things? As far as the plunging necklines business, who would be interested in a plunging neckline on a male? And what was that remark about a man rarely seeing a woman's side? Which side do you happen to be talking about?

Don't worry about the dealer. That look he is giving you happens to be one of admiration, not suspicion. He sneaked a look into TWS one day when business was slow and has nothing but respect now for the people who actually pay cash money to read it.

THE EARL OF STANDING
by Earl Downey

Dear Moon Mines: How's the old zirconium deposit? Feeling good no doubt until he spotted the name on this letter. Sammy boy you is (ugh) a nice guy (catch him somebody) you printed a good, in fact a wonderful story in TWS this time, you usually do of course but this was as good a story as I've read in a long time. I mean of course Wallace West's "THE BIRD OF TIME." Thrilling Wonder finally lived up to its name. Oboy now we need a sequel. This and Magnus Ridolph too and Manning Draco. Ummmmm.

Seibel is pretty sharp these days. Just look at the point on his head. I agree with Earl T. Parris I know a pretty Fem fan also. I think I agree with Joe Gibson too. Why I dunno but I do, I think (Hah).

Sammy I need some help. I'd like to get a copy of TWS for October '49 could some of you fen help me? I also want the May '52 ish of SS, can you help me Sam? Could someone tell me where I could get some of the Master stories by Harry Bates? is possible?

Oh by the way I like the changes in my favorite 'zines. The first SF mag I ever read was the July '49 SS. If anybody has any back issues of the terrible twins I'll take 'em off his hands. I wonder if I'm the only stfan around Gadsden. I've never seen anybody but me in the area that buys stf.—*Route 2, Gadsden, Ala.*

P. S. I'm also an unemployed artist (Hopeful that is). E. D.

Just inaugurated a new policy. No silly questions get answered. Gotta get a little tone in this daffy column. You want people should think we are a little loopy? Pay attention, we get some very intellectual letters by mistake once in a while. Will somebody send the Earl the mags he wants while we step out for an aspirin?

RE-ENTER THE SARGE
by Edwin Corley, Am 1/c

Dear Sam: Shifting about for Uncle S. has left me slightly in doubt concerning several correspondents—my letter file has gotten all fouled up—consequently I'm not sure whose I've answered. If any of you reading this have written me and received no answer, drop a line and cuss me out. (They *will* be reading this, won't they, Sam . . . Sam, *won't* they? SAM! What are you doing with that waste-basket?)

Miss Snavely, take a letter.

TO: All the wide, goofy world.

FROM: Me.

Dear World:

What's the matter with you, young feller? Are you feeling down at the heels, all because of a little mixup over which parta you is East and which is West?

Where's your native gumption,
Your unbelied assumption
That the best is yet to come, come what may?
Why are you feeling poorly,
When your cure is coming surely—
And that cure is in a *thought* to start the day.
I was ridin' out near Eros
With my fuel gauge showin' zeros,
And a' feelin' that my losin' fight was fought.
But I threw her into free fall
And just like a lumbering sea yawl
I made my port of call—because I thought.
So, name your biggest troubles—
Lying cops or flying bubbles
Or a bunch of jerks that simply can't be taught;
And if you ever find your answer
Be it Peace—or curing cancer,
It'll only be because you stopped—and thought!

What's that got to do with TWS? Not a solitary thing, but it seemed to be something that oughta be said.

Your August Emsh was terrific. Sorry I can't say the same for the current Bergey. There's no doubt that Earle K. has improved tremendously—but, wotthehell, I never kicked about him, even in the old days. In fact, I used to marvel over how he could turn out three stf covers, four or five westerns, a couple of sports and love and what have you—all in one month. It's just that, for the sake of my grandmother's left snaggletooth, I wish his green BEM *HAD*: Joints; thumbs; *DIDN'T HAVE*: Rover ears; Migawd-I-Got-Water-On-The-Pastel shading; frogish, oriental orbs; puckish mouth.

Now, Sam, to the point. The Great Ghu knows, when you published *THE LOVERS* in SS, I went berserk, even as you and Jerry. I've always made it a point not to crusade for stf, because I don't believe in forcing my tastes on someone else. But

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at the appearance of *LOVERS*, I pressed it upon everyone, from the most dyed-in-the-color-of-The Master Joyce-reader, to my CO, who cherishes Faulkner and Caldwell. And, they all loved it. I sold you some mags! Your circulation around Montgomery boomed. The local blat, at my insistance, even ran a review of José's masterpiece. Okay. This was just fine and dandy, well and good, hunkydory and so on.

Sex is here to stay, some joker has said every ten minutes for the past ten thousand years. No doubt. I'm all for it. After all, without sex, where would *I* be? And I admire TWS and SS—and you, Sam, for advocating more mature stories in which sex is allowed to appear in its true light: as an important and essential part of life on this or any other planet.

What I do not admire is exploitation of sex as something that will sell more cigarettes, cars, Coca-cola, bathing suits, beer, pipe tobacco and science-fiction magazines. So far as my two bits go, sex is not going to be smeared across a cover or blurb just to convince the shnooks that TWS is a good erotic buy.

I'm not accusing you of having done this—yet. But the signs are present: a short in your latest SS—concerning artificially grown mates contained in survival kits. Cute. Also close to the borderline. And the clever blurb for *BIRD OF TIME*. So you've got a little sex in a story, because boys is boys and girls is there fur 'em. No one's objecting. But hinting coyly at the delights of a four-sided honeymoon in hopes of attracting a stray quarter is just apt to lose one or two other coins, here and there. Particularly here.

So how's about it, huh? Keep the sex. Hemingway does it. Eugene O'Neill does it. Phillip Wylie does it. Everybody does it, so why not Sam Mines? Just don't cheapen it up in search of a quick buck. Okay, Sam? Still friends?

ANYBODY: I like Bradbury. Dianetics bewilder me. I like dames on my covers. I think we've all got a good chance of escaping from being blown to here and gone, because I believe in a peculiar Code that includes freedom to live, think and be happy. Anyone wanna fight?—*Hq Sq Sect. Air Force Missile Test Center, Patrick AFB Cocoa, Florida.*

To take up your main gripe first, you've practically echoed our words in talking about no cheap sex for the sake of a quick buck. In discussing the newer trends with authors, we have always agreed that sex is not to be dragged in for its own sake. No author has ever had orders to sex up a story. If it comes about naturally we don't intend to hide from it because it is only one of the facts of life we hope to present more honestly. What it boils down to in the long run, is a matter of taste. And apparently you agree that there was no breach of taste in either THE LOVERS or BIRD OF TIME. Even the blurb for BIRD wasn't out of character; it represented a major point in the Martians' thinking, to whom monogamy was lewd and repulsive. Think of it as an intellectual concept, Sarge, a social phenomenon to be regarded with scientific detachment rather than personal interest.

Probably TWS is no place to discuss THE LOVERS, but we wanted to say thanks for your yoeman missionary work in spreading the word. You've probably seen the November issue of SS and from it deduced that the story started a large flurry in stf circles. Ackerman tells me it caused excitement in Los Angeles, and Mel Korshak ditto in Chicago. And the letters are still coming in, many of them from our best professional writers who are frank and generous in their praise for a story they agree they wish they had written. It is gratifying to know that a story we felt heralded a new era for science fiction has been so intelligently received.

For the poetry, no thanks. In the first place I couldn't understand it; in the second place you're not going to trap me into writing some more of my own crummy verse. I've got self-respect I 'as. Say, Sarge, what happened to your rating?

FLABBERGASTED SNALLYGASTER

by Craig Sutton

Dear Sam: Again I am flabbergasted! I am far past speech, therefore I'm writing. This time, though, not at the shorts. After the words of unbearable praise I've been sending you recently, the shorts again let me down. This is, of course, on your TWS for October which I just laid hands on. A bit late, I might (and did) add. No, the shorts were your usual, cruddy best . . . you must pick them with your eyes closed.

It's your double-novelet lineup. In TWS I've seen a Vance Magnus Ridolph or a Crossen Manning Draco . . . but never before a Ridolph *and* a Draco in the same ish. At least you are beginning to see the light. As a general rule, you always have top novelets, but never two of the best character novelets in the same ish. We who are about to jump for joy salute thee.

The West novel was good, but outclassed by far. 'Nuff said.

But I am also flabbergasted (not to be confused with a flabbergaster, which is a cousin to the snallygaster, the feared beast of Eastern forests) at your crass partisanism. What do you do . . . pay the guy for his letters? I refer, of course, to Gregg Calkins. *Two* letters in one ish? Really Sam . . . you should know better than that. It just ain't nice. If it says either Calkins or Seibel it gets printed. At first I thought Seibel was the only automatic with you, but you have gained another. How's about making me a third?

Maybe you should call your mag Flabbergasting Stories. It would suit my selection of adjective (no plural) better. Very inconsiderate of you. For, once again yet, I am flabbergasted. After having finished Seibel's letter, I don't know just where I am. Are you *sure* Liddell is Kuttner? Maybe Liddell is a pseudo for Vance, who in return is a pseudo for Leinster. And as everybody knows, Leinster is Kuttner. Or is Leinster Vance

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and Vance is Kuttner? Oh hell . . . I give up! Does anybody have a copy of "Fantasy Pseudonyms?"

If I keep this short, maybe it'll get printed and break that everlasting Seibel-Calkins monopoly on your TRS, which you claim is a letter column, but which is, in disguise, only a two-man rejected-manuscript department. You hated to disillusion them, so you put it in the letter column rather than destroy their hopefulness with slips. I'm still flabergasted, but you are too by now. Until next TWS. . .

In the December issue I publicly offered to cut my throat over the Calkins coup and relegated Calkins to the doghouse. He was unrepentant when I saw him at the Chicago convention, but after all how repentant can a man look with two noses on his face?

How about putting your address on your letters if you want to get into the act? Who told you Leinster was Kuttner? His wife might have something to say about that!

IT GETS VERSE

by John L. Magnus Jr.

Y'know, Sam;
Though some may say that TWS is not the bestest yet,
It's one mag you can count on for good stories . . . that's a bet.
Best thing in the Oct. ish was the Kuttner novelette.
(Why call him Vance or Padgett . . . how silly can you get?)
Though Bergey swings a mean brush when he does a big, green BEM,
I still prefer to look on while he's dressing down a femme.
Let's have more of Kuttner, and some more of Wallace West.
Why not let them write the zine . . . to heck with all the rest.
What to do with all the others? Farm 'em out to SPACE, I guess.
Two months I gotta wait now, for the next TWS.

Maybe I like Kuttner because of his character's first name—9612 *Second Avenue, Silver Spring, Md.*

As this department was being written we had just received word of Earle Bergey's death and had managed to get an announcement into the January issue of SS. So by now most fans will know. There was a question then about this verse of John's, but we decided to let it go as it was for under all the kidding there was honest appreciation of Bergey and the part he played in growing up with our science fiction mags. The fans were sometimes caustic about his "babes" but they recognized his craftsmanship, they knew he was the "Mr. Science Fiction" of the cover artists. He painted babes when it was expected of him, but he was a remarkable technician and could do almost anything needed. His latest work showed experimentation along several new lines and he would have produced in the next few years the kind of covers which, like the August SS and some others, would have made the fans rub their eyes. We'll miss him.

Thanks, John for the picture of me sounding off at the Chicago convention, even if it does make me look like a turkey gobbling. Whatever I was saying, it must have been funny, judging by Howard Browne's face over the right shoulder.

FRUSTRATED

by Zillah Kendall

Dear Mr. Mines: Few stranger things have occurred between the covers of a Science-Fiction magazine than this—that I should sit down and write to the editor. And there's not much provocation for it, either, except for the mere fact that I'm on "vacation," bored, and need some outlet. A frustrated female, that's me.

Frustrated at all the people I know who laugh when you mention a flying saucer, or look at you strangely when you mention you read S.F. I know there are many, many people who read such, but where are they? Are they like the people who, a few years ago, went around saying they were voting for Dewey?

Just by reading the many letters which I have read in such magazines since I was about 14 years old—(back in the Hugo Gernsback days), I know many such folks exist, but I wait in vain. In all my seasoned years, none such have I found—that is, knowingly. I think that's why so many people write in—because they can't find flesh and blood brothers or sisters under-the-skin.

Only deplorable thing I find about said letters is the general juvenile tone of them. Not that I find anything against youth. I love it. But it makes me feel lonelier than ever. Where are all the folks who read this wonderful stuff, 'way back then?

Perhaps they, as I, have decided they have outgrown such meanderings. But unlike them—I turn back occasionally long enough to remind me that these writers were 'way ahead of the A-Bomb, rocket ships and all that goes with them.

To my friends I insist that the writers of Science-Fiction are among the most brilliant of the age—many of them being professors of mathematics, or some—such (as was Lewis Carroll) and just giving their minds a little recreation.

Got your October number of TWS yesterday. First such fare I've digested in some time. Too busy and harassed these days for such indulgence—but when I do get such a chance, there's no better escape literature. Some of your young fans may howl at that phrase, in their youthful intolerance—but that's understandable. What use have they for escape?

Before I get to sounding like a female Methuselah I think I'll get down to points. First—I can tell the calibre of an issue by that which I most enjoy—the stories or the letters. If it's the stories—then its superb. If it's the letters, it's still worth the money.

This one I liked for the letters, even though,

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as usual, I was nettled by the youthful egotism of some of the writers and also awed by their terrific knowledge. Oh, if I had all *that* I'd be writing *stories* instead of foolish letters!

Haven't yet read past Wallace Parsons. There you have the boiled down essence of youthful cockiness, useless knowledge and lack of perspective! I simply cannot understand someone who says "forget Bradbury." Just like that! That's just a place where Bradbury's genius fell upon fallow ground. What a pity! But look at all the things the child knows! Yet he had to ask—"What is a BEM?" There you have it in a nutshell.

Poor, uninformed kid! Well, thank goodness, he is at least smart enough to ask questions, and that's probably how he got to know that 85 degrees C is 185 F, not 180 F, and other such hair-splitting, but important things.

Am getting a little more sarcastic than I meant to, there. After all, we're pinning our hopes of the future on such bright kids as Wallace Parsons, so I'll lay off him.

I do wish, though, that the fans would stop their "yuk yuk's", "Heh-hehs", and other such puerilities. It destroys the very effect they're trying to attain.

John Woehler I rather liked, but was dismayed at his method of dining while in the pursuit of knowledge. He really has something and should work at it. However, he'll probably make the grade, willy-nilly.

"Bird of Time" is strictly for the birds. One sequence, though, where Yahna invaded the territory of the Avron, was vivid and dreamlike enough to match a painting by Dali.

This author could do much if he would quit trying to be clever. His chief talent lies in imagery—not satire. He tries too hard and produces something entirely unreal and uninteresting. The human values were lacking there. We are still humans, tied down to this particular Earth—and though we like to take flights we're still Earth-bound in the sense that the old values remain. There's no use kidding around about it. Let's not get *too* flighty, my vivid friend.

Rest of the stories were better, by far. Often have I wondered why so many times the shorter stories have more pith. Why don't they elaborate? After all you get paid by the word!

"Fool's Errand" in my opinion, was best. It probably will never see the light of day again because such gems get lost in the shuffle. So many S.F. readers shy away from philosophy. But why should they? The whole speculation of universes beyond must have some flavor of philosophy. And universe, cosmos, or any other system be damned; it's the personal feeling, the personal life and reactions *to* these big things which count to each person. Anything else is null, void, and without meaning.

Good luck to your new space opera magazine but I'll never buy it and I think you know why.

Before I leave—here's hoping there'll soon be more women writers in S.F. (who'll be willing to admit it.) And more women writers *in*. Don't know whether I'll have time to read you for another year, but a thousand years is but a day! So who am I?—3156 *"E" St., San Brnardino, Calif.*

P.S. (Meaning Polluted Sequence) The cover *is* better! Once started to write to you about that a long time ago. Had to hide it from my daughter, those days. The cover, I mean. It's time to assume dignity about the Future. We're face to face with it.

Fortunately we have no suicidal tendencies. . .

But for all your dim outlook on this and that, we detect a certain note of pride that the kind of imagination and vision exists which makes science fiction possible. And there we'll go along. It does take a very high order of creative imagination to cut loose from all that is familiar and visualize what no man has ever seen. Which is why we toot the horn for certain of our authors who are doing a quality of work you do not find in many ultra-respected publications. With which pat on the back we retire.

A TIME AND PLACE
by E. M. Britney

Dear Sam: I DON'T write to editors; I am NOT a science fiction fan capable of writing two column length letters. I enjoy SF at midnight after a hellish ten or twelve hours in the office. But your October issue—letter section—compels me to forego my amiable detachment and write briefly, and I hope, with some vigor.

PLEASE put a ban on further letters and comments on theology. I am sick of reading it. Why should any of your correspondents have the conceit to feel their private opinions on religion matter to anyone but themselves? A man's views on religion are his own business—so long as he doesn't try to ram them down someone else's throat. If belief works for a guy, let him believe; if belief seems incongenial to another, let him ignore it. Meantime, let fiction editors keep their sights trained on fiction—its aims, uses, possibilities, values, etc., leaving the futilities of theological tugs of war to those who enjoy such exercises.

No, this letter doesn't put across how strongly I urge you to BAN theological controversy in your book.

Half past midnight. Wanted to read a short story but am too tired and put off by theology in TWS. So to hell with it. Will look into some later when I cool to a forgiving temper—*92½ Avenue Road, Toronto 5, Ontario, Canada.*

Draw nearer, if you have cooled off enough to keep from crisping us that is, and let us whisper a secret in your pointed ear. We keep promising ourselves that we aren't going to run another letter that even hints of theology. And then we see all those lovely sparks and like a kid entranced by fireworks we think we'll try just one more pinwheel. . . .

They do throw a lot of sparks, don't they?

THE MARIJUANA AGAIN
by Jim Harmon

Dear Sam: You mean to say that I *really* wrote that letter in the December TWS? Funny how that marijuana hits me at times. Rather sophonic, didn't

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you think? No, you didn't think—you published it. Oh, I suppose it was good fun. But it was that senseless non-destructive comradely good-natured type of letter that can't be tolerated. I didn't think of anything to save the scientific, artistic, culural, and/or physical world. I'll be crucified on the double-cross of public pinions.

Anyway, I noticed Once over Lightly was considerably further helmwards than my previous letter which you titled Once over Heavily and which I thought was fairly Serious and Constructive. That undoubtedly shows something. Too much. Use a table-cloth quick! I feel the chlorophyll vapor of the WCTL. We're caught in a cultural pattern from which there is No Escape, Sam. A period in the cycle of science fiction when an editor and a reader can be moderately intimate. Not too much! Laney's spies are everywhere. But enough. This too shall pass. The onrush of passive readers will push active fans like me into oblivion. You'll find yourself confronted by ever growing piles of "This-Is-My-First-Letter-To-Any-Magazine" letters. Marching Morons. Ad Finitum. Ad Astra. Yes, Marion, too. Maybe someday after fiendish military mis-uses of the scientist's art have made everybody—well, almost—hate stf, I'll find you typing carbons of *FIND THE SCULPTOR* behind a pile of building rubble. Maybe I can even help you bring out THRILLING WONDER STORIES in carbon copy form. Let's drink to that.

You too, Bixby—but why don't you sit on the floor to begin with? You won't have so far to fall. What's going to happen to science fiction when it hits the bottom of its cycle? Maybe it won't be too bad. Detective fiction has just about hit bottom as far as popularity is concerned, but it's far from extinction. Mickey Spillane may even bring it back to public favor if he doesn't get committed to one institution or another first—literary criticism. Maybe you'll stay out of them, too. Maybe you won't carbon-copy TWS. Maybe you'll even mimeograph it. Maybe we won't even blow ourselves up. The Martians may even get us first. Let's hope none of their meteors that shoot at us will disturb the minor constellations. Minors need their sleep. John L. Lewis says so. Hey, Jerry, has JLL been investigating Mines' shafts and tunnels lately? Careful! Laney's spies are everywhere.

Jerry Bixby is a man after my own heart (not with a knife, though, please). I said the same things he says about stf on TV when THE THING came out. Jerry, you should see the movie RED PLANET MARS if you can afford to lose the money. Plenty of "Oh, John . . . it's . . . *evil*" plus a good measure of "Look how happy scientific progress has made with Noble's invention of dynamite and Einstein's invention of the atom bomb (sic)" plus an awful lot corny melodramatics: WIFEY: "YOU'LL ADVANCE US RIGHT INTO *OBLIVION!*" and of course the final touch: the triumph of old-time religion over the wicked "false god" of Science.

You see, a Handsome Young Scientist with his Pretty But Emotional Wife contacts Mars and gets a couple of messages from them saying that Martians live three hundred years, use atomic power instead of coal, oil or electricity, and so forth' which promptly makes all the insurance companies go out of business, the coal mines shut down, puts everybody out of a job, and so forth. Then Mars begins to spout quotations from the approved King James version and it turns out God is up there on Mars. Need I go on?

With a little knowledge of story construction, you ought to be able to figure the rest out right up to the heroic, self-sacrificing, Going-Up-The-Glory-Road-To-The-Eternal-Reward death of the Scientist and his Wife. Whoever was behind this religious picture wasn't being very ethical in palming it off as Science Fiction. If anything (which is doubtful) it was anti-Science Fiction.

I bet those radio waves disturbed the minor constellations.

Onions to you, Sam, for letting Crossen marry off Draco. It's like Pan settling down to goat herding. Palooka, Tracy, Superman . . . is the spirit of good-fellowed, bacherlorly adventure dead? At least Jack, Doc, and Reggie of I LOVE A MYSTERY haven't married triplets yet—God forbid. Maybe it's just as well if Hamilton doesn't bring back Captain Future. Leave him in Limbo, single and happy.

Incidentally, Sam, you say you don't buy comic books for yourself usually. Does that mean you have children? Ordinarily, I'd say that was treason to the human race but they may take after their mother. I like Susan. She seems to think fans are cute little swamp critters. Why don't you think we're cute, Sam? Why, I once knew an editor who went into a room with three fans who carried straight razors. Can't remember his name but after that everybody called him Smiley. Well, don't sit there with that silly grin on your face. You know how fans like to pry into editor's private lives. Tell us about your kids.

Don't know why your publisher puts up with some of his editors—especially when he could get me for such a reasonable salary.—427 *East 8th St., Mt. Carmel, Ill.*

Any salary paid you could hardly be considered reasonable, in fact reason totters on her throne at the appalling idea.

As for your base slander about me being called Smiley—you've got me confused with Ed Sullivan. And I would never go into a room with three fans, whether they carried straight razors or petunias. Any time there are three fans in a room I leave. The draft is terrible. It's true Susan thought the fans were cute—that was before she started reading TRS. Ah, what a rude awakening comes to us all.

Did you say children? I've got a nine-year old daughter who spurns dolls, beats up all the neighborhood boys, and likes Standard's sf comics—L O S T WORLDS, FANTASTIC WORLDS and JETTA—I buy, Pogo for me. Haven't seen JETTA? With your passion for Tom Mix, you'll love it. Teen age stuff in a future world, gay, light-hearted—ah, youth.

REDUCED FOR CLEARANCE

by (Miss) Trina Perlson

Dear Mr. Mines: . . . . . Please print this letter

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because I've never written to a stf mag before and I'm dying to see my letter in print—109-11 127*th Street, South Ozone Park, 20, N.Y.*

Well, it's like this: After we cut out the slightly bewildering verse in the first part of the letter and the story ratings in the second part—that's all that was left. Does look a little short, doesn't it? But you got your letter in print, so I hope it saved your life. And Trina—what makes you think "daughter" rhymes with "saucer?"

PAYING THE PIPER
by Tom Piper

Dear Mr. Mines: Hey, what happened to the October cover? The tentacled BEM looked like a homeless GHU (what's a GHU?) (Ghu knows? —Ed.) And the femmes—they're usually larger and nuder. These are nuts.

Why did you accept FOOL'S ERRAND? The plot is older than Gernsback's reprints.

How will fandom abbreviate SPACE STORIES? STARTLING already has the SS. (Easy: SPS—Ed.)

Jack Gatto, (who, thanks to TRS has a new correspondent) has a good idea. Although I don't want to see TWS overrun with letters, I too want a longer letter page. (11½ pages now—WOW!)

Wallface (oops, I mean Wallace) Parsons started something: Gad, don't throw away Bradbury. The more you print the more I like it. Wally's nuts. We'll set up la guillotine for him if he doesn't like letters. Why talk about music in a stf mag?

I'm 12 and would like pen-fen my age or older.—464-19*th St., Santa Monica, Cal.*

P.S. Can you get Cartier?

P.P.S. You may print this if you wish (sarcasm.)

Only twelve and already parenthesis happy! These precocious little space BEMS.

It looks as if nobody can get Cartier any more. Scuttlebutt hath it that he has shifted to commercial art full time. More dough amongst the hucksters, what can you do?

ROOM SERVICE
by Mildred Moore

Dear S. M.: I don't remember whether it was TWS or SS in which a request appeared from a reader about a science fiction book club. I've found one—the "Readers' Service Book Club," 119 San Fernando Street, San Jose, 13, California.

Do you know why there aren't any stf programs on radio any more? There were two once: DIMENSION X and 2000 PLUS. What happened?

Why doesn't some stf magazine sponsor one? They wouldn't have to be new stories.—116 *William Street, Hightstown, N. J.*

I suspect the reason an stf magazine doesn't sponsor a show such as you suggest is just a little matter of cost. The expense of radio or TV time, actors, sets and so forth are fantastic. The editorial cost is a small fraction of the total. And few magazines, unfortunately, are that wealthy. In fact, in TV particularly, even the giant corporations were finding their shows too expensive with the result that several sponsors are now sharing a single program to divide the cost. Makes your ambition a bit problematical, to say the least.

ASSIMILATION
by Petro "The Great" Rodriganda

Dear Ed: . . . . . It is always being said that writers should read scients before writing sf. I now raise the question, "Should Editors read scients before writting articles?"

Had to laff over Edward the Seibel's letter, him making believe he could read TWS in fifteen minutes. I cant even do that and greater genius than mine is impossible. Should not have let those boys throw the nitric acid on the mag, after all its organic.

Here is a thought to all fans that can read german, ran across a man names Hans Dominik some of his books are good, not all but some.

Please turn off Bill Tuning.

Please excuse the spelling, typographic. Haha.

Took the ratings out of your letter too, Petro, but I left in all the typos, okay? How you going to get any mail if you don't put an address on your letter?

TO SPACE
by George Gunner

Dear Sir: I always enjoy reading your editorials in THE READER SPEAKS and your mention of apathy is my reason for writing. Believe it or not, I have read practically all the science fiction magazines ever published, starting with Gernsback's "Electrical Experimenter" in the early twenties, then Amazing and of course "Wonder Stories" from the first issues. I see your volume is four issues, which makes the first about 1937 or 38 if published monthly. It seems I read them longer ago than that. Well, I have read most all of the other SF mags also. I can't read them all now, there are too many, so stick to the old standbys.

You wonder what type of stories are liked best. Of course people's tastes differ. I prefer the homely type stemming from Burroughs. SF became too unreal for me a long time ago, so haven't read it very often in the last few years. Suggestion, bind a reply card in a few issues for the readers to return with their choices listed by number and you will soon find out the type most desired. Expensive, but might be worth it.

I have been an Aeronautical Engineer for over 30 years and have given a good deal of thought to space travel. It is entirely possible now. It is possible to build up tremendous speeds with constant acceleration which is also possible now and it will not be long before these things are commonly

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known. So maybe we will see space travel a reality before very long. Much as the S.F. mags play up rockets they are not the answer entirely although they will play their part. Of course atomic energy is the answer. Enough of that.

I have always considered TWS one of the best and right now the best. Haven't ever written any S. F. mag before, not being very literarily inclined except from the reading standpoint. Keep the good stories coming. They are appreciated.—*Bonnie Brook Farm, West Falls, New York.*

The imminence of space travel seems to be sneaking up on all sorts of unexpected people. In the last couple of months we've seen serious TV shows stemming from Johns Hopkins describing the last few steps to be taken before the jump into space; you've seen "Collier's" by now with the second and third of their series on space travel. These developments give science fiction a new impetus and very likely a new respectability, in case anyone cares. Thanks for nice letter.

HASTA LA VISTA
by Dick Clarkson

THE BIRD OF TIME was a good enuf story, but you really should have had someone who knew Spanish to go over it first. That one sentence there made me laugh like crazy, it sounded so funny. *"Es posible que estaba escuchando."* I still laugh. Not at Mr. West, but at the way that made the sentence sound. It should be either *"estuviera"* or *"estuviese"*, not *"estaba"*. A different form of the verb is necessary there, and the whole idea is thrown out of whack. Ah, well . . . . such is life.

And the good ol' bem is back again, I see. But may I ask a question? Just which story was that supposed to illustrate?

I'm tired. Therefore, I'll shut up. Hasta luego, Sam. Framp again,—410 *Kensington Rd. Baltimore 29, Md.*

We put it up to Mr. West, fair and square. "What about this?" we asked, being as innocent of Spanish ourselves as a newly hatched Martian hryllzgvfl. "Does Frampie have a case?"

"Sure he does," said author West, blowing a red feather off his desk. "It's grammatically wrong; but don't forget that these boys didn't know much Spanish themselves and were just groping for words to foil the opposition. Under those circumstances it would be perfectly natural for them to make a grammatical mistake, wouldn't it?" Sure. Logical. Just can't pin down some of these authors, can you?

WORDS AND REVELATIONS
by "Bobby Boy, the Pin-head" Farnham

Dear Mr. Mines: The cover pic on my Aug. TWS was a revelation, a fan's delight, and now graces the wall of my den in a nice little frame. THAT pic, bar none, is the BEST that has ever come on TWS, SS, or the old Wonder Stories!! I rise with a whoop (I'm a Baptist) to acclaim the artist, EMSH, and promise you bombs in your mail if you ever let go of him/her. (???). (Him—Ed.)

LORDS OF THE MORNING was thoroughly enjoyed but this tale was spoiled for me because Hamilton cut loose with a swear word. Now don't get me wrong—I can cuss as well as anyone else—and do when I'm mad enough—but I do NOT like to see it in TWS or SS. To my mind, profanity degrades the story, the author, the editor, the publication in which it appears and gives the impression that neither author nor editor have a lot of respect for reader-mentality.

If any author can't write without the aid of profanity, he's slipped back too far, and should quit.

I was considerably amused to note that Jim Harmon gave you the doubtful honor of having applied the appellation of PINHEAD in my letter. Jim and I have been staunch friends for some 7 years, and entered fandom almost together, but a few months apart. I'll assume you'll recognize the inspiration for the way I've written my name on this letter . . . my opinion remains unaltered, but, as I am determined to become involved in no more feuds, I'm passing up Pvt. Moir's letter, but do wish to say that the character to whom Pvt. Moir referred as being kicked out of the Centaurians, was not able to find others of his ilk before whom to air his snobbish views, and in utter frustration, bit himself and died of rabies.

As for Pvt. Moir's "Salute" to me;
"WHY! — *PRIVATE MOIR!!*"
TSK! Tsk!

Marion Cox: Could I join the Little Monsters? I'm a pretty big Monster . . . I also met Lynn Hickman at Nolacon and while speaking of Cons, if Sam Mines or Jerry Bixby show up I'm going to take a couple of shots at them. (at Chicon 2) with my flash-camera, that is. . . . (He did—Ed.)

The contents of TWS this Aug. ish left nothing to be desired and I read THE QUAKER LADY AND THE JELPH twice, I liked it that well. Ditto for LORDS OF THE MORNING. . .

I vote—emphatically—to discontinue the religious fights in The Reader Speaks and vote against publishing anything of like nature that arouses feuds . . . None of us will know for certain till we die whether or not the preacher was right, so why scrap about it now? As far as I can see the so-called discussions are but thinly disguised feuds. And for one person to damn another because that person does, or does not believe in God (I do!) is nothing but rank discrimination and anyone who fights over religion—or the lack of it, simply cheapens himself. As I say I believe in God, but I know one lad who is an atheist pure and simple, but otherwise a darned swell lad. . . . and I don't mean to insinuate that 'otherwise' means I find fault with him because he has no faith. Let us stick to science fiction and fantasy fiction.—104 *Mountain View Drive, Dalton, Ga.*

Nothing really bad in the way of swear words is apt to get through these aseptic halls, Bobby, partly on account of the post office, partly on account of a theory I have that any individual

(Turn to Page 138)

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with any command of his native tongue should be able to express himself quite fluently and clearly without falling back upon certain notorious cliches. To use swear words or dirty words with monotonous regularity is merely a confession of an inadequate vocabulary.

It was nice seeing you and your Brownie at the Chicon; too bad there were something like 1400 people there so it was impossible to spend a day with each.

MOSKOWITZ FOREVER
by Jack Moskowitz

Dear Mr. Mines: To get right in the groove of things I must agree with Bill Tuning on the identity of Jack Vance. I firmly believe that Jack Vance *is* Henry Kuttner. As far as I have been able to find out nobody living in California has ever seen Vance in person. And if Vance isn't Kuttner why doesn't he come out and say so?

Henry Moskowitz is *not* related either to me or my cousin Sam Moskowitz *in any way whatsoever!* Captain Future? Who's he kidding? The only person who should be brought back into the spotlight again is the author David H. Keller. There's a man who could really write a terrific story!—177 *Shephard Ave., Newark* 8, *N.J.*

Having seen, spoken to, and pinched both Vance and Kuttner, I am at long last in a position to put a stop to at least one of the dopey feuds currently tearing fandom into small, well-deserved shreds. Vance is not Kuttner. I know of no pseudonyms used by Jack Vance. Somewhere else I remarked that Jack Vance is a big, young rugged specimen who looks rather more like a lumberjack than a writer; while Hank Kuttner is slim, gentle and soft-spoken. *Now* do you believe me?

No? Okay, here's a quote from a letter I just received from Henry Kuttner. Among other things he says:

> "I see that the letter columns still plaintively ask if Hamilton, Vance and Sam Mines are Kuttner pseudonyms. Next time you can safely refer the inquirers to Don Day's INDEX TO THE SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINES, which carries the authorized correct listing on the Kuttner-Moore pseudonyms. There are, God help me, eighteen of them, including single-shots and house names. Sometimes I wonder how —or why—I ever did it."

DER GOOSTEP
by Richard E. Geis

Dear Sam: Just a short word or two about the Oct. TWS. It just occurred to me that the three leading stories; BIRD OF TIME, KOKOD WARRIORS, POLLUXIAN PRETENDER, all three are either outright fantasy, or are so very close that the borderline is obscured. How about an occasional gadget story? Too much of this fast und loose playing und you *science* fiction fans will lose. Yah mine hair.

The cover. . . well . . . let's just say that it covered. I suppose you had the thing in your files, it had to be used sometime, so . . . lousy as it was . . . you used it. That's all right, Sam, those things happen. I understand. But, DON'T LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN. 2631 *N. Mississippi, Portland* 12, *Oregon.*

Yes, marster, lay down de whip, marster. You don't scare us. Approach—step right in a little closer and let us give you a glimpse into the inner circle. Our main concern in holding down this battered old editorial chair (and avoiding that busted spring) is to get the best possible stories we can cajole, wheedle, force and threaten out of our authors. *Too much* good stuff never comes in. When we spot a good story we just grab it without asking a lot of silly questions about whether it is fantasy or science fiction. Besides we had a couple of soul-shattering experiences in which various letter writers proved by logic that a certain story was (1) fantasy (2) pure science fiction (3) space opera. Since then we have tossed all definitions to the fan editors who seem to have more answers than we do. Who knows—next issue you may get stories a-clank and a-jingle with gadgets. I know one thing, we've got a Willy Ley article which should be in that issue. Happy?

IT'S THE NOVEL-TY
by Bill Evans

Dear Sam: You've dunnit again! What? You've printed a li'l ole 40 page story and called it a NOVEL—a novel, hah! Sure it was good, but we want *something* to read! I paid my two bits to sit down and enjoy some good long reading andwodo-yoogimmie—a little o'this and a little o'that. Goldurn it, Sam, get some LONG NOVELS! Now gimme a second to cool off and simmer down.

Gee, Sam, you really edit a swell magazine. It's only that "novel" stuff that gets me. And, like Calkins says, "get some fanzine reviews in THE FRYING PAN, even if they burn to a crisp! "Pun, son. I hope I've given you enough compliments (left-handed, that is) that you'll let me make a simple request of the readers.

I have quite a few back issues SF and detective mags. If anyone wants to take them off my hands, cheap, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to me and specify whether you want detective or SF.—3859 *Silsby Road, Clevelend,* 11, *Ohio.*

You must have led a sheltered life. Where were you when we were explaining that by design, not accident, SS prints the LONG novel

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and TWS prints two short novels? This is all part of an insidious plot to get you to buy both mags. You buy SS for the LONG novel and it is so good you can't stand the suspense wondering about what we put into TWS so you break down and buy that too. Anyway an author hasn't too much control over story ideas. Today he may get an idea for a short-short, tomorrow for a book length or for a tale which will only go to 25,000 words or so. Having a use for all these lengths makes us happy for it imposes fewer artificial restrictions on our writers and lets them work in a more relaxed fashion. Oh, and have you seen SPACE STORIES? With the LONG novels by Vance and Brackett?

DEFINITION
by M. D'Imperio

Dear Sir: The subject of religion in science fiction brought up in your letter column recently, has tempted me to contribute my opinions. First, however, let me say that TWS is certainly a very attractive magazine nowadays; your August cover was very pleasant to look at. That is the kind of cover that sells a magazine to me.

About religion; I am not an atheist, nor am I a member of any organized religion. I criticize no religious view. But I do not see how a real science fiction story could be written within any orthodox religious background, in a way that would gratify and reassure those who, like Ernest and Bertha Sundet, accept as reality the world view that goes with that background. Science fiction at its best seems to me a field which should not cater to vested interests or pander to established views any more than should Science itself.

The kind of Science Fiction I like catches an idea, lets it go among some real characters and watches where it goes and what it does. It does not decide ahead of time where the idea is to go and then shove it there by force. An example of the type of "religious" bias I mean is the prevailing tone of Humanism (in the sense of exalting the Human Race as the highest good of the universe) in many science fiction stories. I would like to see this view less taken for granted than it is in some quarters. Incidentally, the editorial comments on the Sundet letter and the letter from John Van Couvering were excellent, in my opinion.

I would like to get in touch with some fans or fan clubs in Washington, D.C. Anyone interested in corresponding, or knowing of clubs or meetings, please write.—1917 *K St., N. W., Washington, D.C.*

Some of you wall-climbers and nail-biters could learn a thing or two from Mr. (?) D'Imperio's dispassionate approach. Ah, logic, we love it, even if we see so little of it. Maybe that's why?

TIME TRAVELER
by H. S. Clements

Dr. Mr. Mines: Something happened to your covers lately? They are improving so rapidly that I'm

[*Turn page*]

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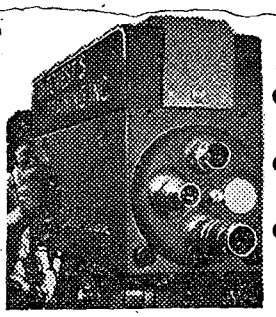

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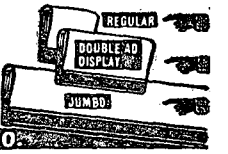

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wondering if I'll ever see any hung in the Royal Academy over here. They would certainly brighten up the old place. The August issue in particular is in a style I like and—Hey! What's up with that girl? She's *dressed,* and in coveralls of all things! Please don't think I'm one of those who make a point of criticising covers; I've long outgrown the state where I used to tear them off before carrying the mag away with me, and when people raise their eyebrows and say "Surely you don't read *that* sort of story," I just say, "Sure, I'm crazy!" and settle down to read in comfort. However, I do appreciate it when the covers are not too garish and give some sort of indication of the nature of the stories within. It saves strain on both eyes and imagination.

Receiving the August issue some time before I expected it and remarkably soon after the June number, I began to suspect that my favorite bookseller owns a time machine capable of reaching about a month into the future. It doesn't appear to be in perfect working order though, the temporal materialiser out of phase no doubt, for somehow part of one copy became grafted on to another with the result that I now possess a complete copy of TWS with a bonus of about thirty extra pages. The sad conclusion I draw is that somewhere some fan is weeping bitter tears over a sadly incomplete TWS. He has my sympathy. I hope he doesn't start looking for you with a cleaver.

To get down to the stories: Hamilton's LORDS OF THE MORNING was good, but I fancied CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS better. Partly, I think, because of the humor in the situation but mainly because of the interesting character of Jean Parlier. At the end I didn't know whether to feel sorry for Mr. Mycroft or to wish I had half his troubles. At least he wasn't likely to die of boredom. COUNTERFEIT came third, readable enough but I much prefer the treatment given the same idea in "Who Goes There?" Of the shorts, Leinster's was the best, the other three went to sleep together. TRS was as lively as ever but I haven't noticed any letters from Captain Ken Slater recently. Maybe I've missed one somewhere. I like to see an occasional letter from a British fan in TRS, it's like meeting a hometown acquaintance in a strange city.—211 *Crownfield Rd., Stratford, London E* 15, *England.*

Think you did miss a letter or two from Ken Slater, we seem to remember hearing from him not too long ago. But if it's word from home you want, here's another and slightly more acrimonious view:

HER MAJESTY'S OPPOSITION

by John Brunner

Dear Sam: This letter is going to be more or less one long beef. I've contained myself for a long time—wishing, I think, to get plenty of scope—rope—for you to hang yourself. But I got the August TWS the other day—and Sam, this is really too much. You've done something I would have thought impossible. You've given us a lead "novel" (long novelet, but let that pass) which is just plain dull.

I've always disapproved of the historical romance dressed up as sf under the guise of time-travel—Wellman's TWICE IN TIME was a glaring offender—but some of them do at least have the merit of excitement. At page twenty me and Hamilton part company.

All in all, I'm forced to the opinion that this is easily the worst of any of your magazines I've yet seen—and I've been with you since SHADOW ON THE SAND in late '50. The supporting novelets were also short on interest: Nourse's undistinguished treatment of the doppelganger theme, and a second instalment of Jean Parlier from Vance, with the same flat quality of writing which characterizes ABERCROMBIE STATION. These are the first two stories of Vance's I have read in which his usual tendency towards excitement and superficial characterization (and very readable, too—see SON OF THE TREE) gives way to a bunch of interesting people, notably Jean herself and the fat persons on the station, with nothing to carry the plot forward steadily. The shorts were a little better; but Sam, I'm worried.

Take Pratt's ingenious but inaccurate SQUARE CUBE LAW in the preceding ish. It's built partly on a disprovable statement—to wit: The most any human being has been able to stand is a little over 4g, except on the moon run. . . (Page 60).

Now you really oughtn't to let a brick like that go all the way to the floor. In an official RAF publication named Air Clues, copies of which I used to read when I should have been instructing my squad in the rudiments of aerodynamics as a sergeant in the Combined Cadet Force at Cheltenham College (that to show that I did have access to said publication, which I think was restricted in circulation), there was an interesting article on a series of acceleration tests made in aircraft coming out of power dives at an RAF station "somewhere in England." The method employed seems to have been to tell the pilot to throw his plane about as hard as he could. Under each seat in the experimenting planes they installed a g-register—you know the kind of thing—with a top limit of 25 g. (As a matter of interest, seat harnesses in RAF aircraft and presumably in USAF planes too, are built to take at least that many times the weight of an average man.) According to the report, 14 g, was commonly recorded by these machines and the record stood at 21g, produced at the very bottom of a dive that all but pulled the aircraft apart. The pilot survived—brought his plane down safely in fact.

A human being is a remarkably well-engineered organized, considering it was designed to perambulate on four limbs, Mr. Pratt. Granted, those examples were virtually instantaneous; but 21 g is a lot of weight.

I had some complaints against Merwin, Sam, but dullness in the stories he selected was not one of them. A few other things I don't like either: the ham-handed humor (so-called) of the abominably badly written Manning Draco stories. Crossen's style has improved suddenly by the way, PASSPORT TO PAX was undistinguished but eminently readable. The maintainence of the sequence of Pratt-Kubilius collaborations—uniformly flat. The publication of stories that re-use an old idea, previously worn to death without saying anything importantly new. Examples: THE PROMISE by D. S. Halacy Jr., THE INTRUDER and LOOKING FOR SOMETHING FROM OUTER SPACE by Robert Zacks.

Biggest disappointment to date: Kuttner's WELL OF THE WORLDS. So much had been said in praise of THE CITY ON THE TIME AXIS

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and another of his fantasies under his own name and I'd enjoyed so many of his Padgett-Liddell-O'Donnell works that it was a positive blow to find WELL OF THE WORLDS a competently written, nonsensical fantasy which really got my goat in the "spinning hexagon cells" and the esoteric, almost Lovecraftian meaninglessness of his references to the "fission of life forms" on the same plane as atomic fission.

However that's not to say that I'm forsaking the Standard pubs. Not yet, anyway. Of course, I realize that an editor's personal opinions, no matter how stringent the line he is compelled to follow or how much he desires to cater to public opinion rather than to himself, are bound to affect the contents of his books. But I do think you're letting too many pedestrian and merely competent yarns slip into your books. And if it goes on, I rather fancy there'll be a big changeover in your readership. Merwin and I were two hearts that beat as one, more or less, though I prefer JWC (bless him!) and Horace Gold; but your tastes are apparently so diverse from his as to make a thundering large change obvious—and presumably a number of people are going to feel the way I do. And do something about it!

Oh well: provided the Standard pubs don't turn into "hobby" magazines like OW and Madge. I and Ray Palmer disagree at every turn. I do *not* like OW for that reason; but I think that if Palmer had a firm interested in sales in a big way to set a wider policy line for him, more people who like such zines as yours, SF, GSF, and F&FS would read his zine too.

Things, on the other hand, I do like: the face-lift you gave SS. It was long overdue. The new TWS is not so nice, and Emsh can do better work than he's done for you. How about what he did for Gold on Beyond Bedlam? Or those gorgeous self-contained pix Relics of an Extinct Race and his Christmas scene on Mars or somewhere? And all the stories haven't been bad. Some, in fact, have been remarkably good. Nominations from TWS since the beginning of the year; SURVIVAL (*boy* what a story!) MOMENT WITHOUT TIME. THE GADGET HAD A GHOST (screwy, but Leinster is a really fine writer—as distinct from a mere author. The difference is that between, say, an engineer and a mere factory-hand.) The August ish, as I stated above, stank. From SS I cull the following as worthy of note: JOURNEY TO BARKUT (see note to Leinster, above). LOST ART. THE GREAT IDEA. THE WHEEL was a worn plot, but the January ish gave me great hopes of the Mines editorial tenure. VULCAN'S DOLLS I nominate for the position of biggest—and most pleasant—surprise to date, in opposition to the Kuttner. (I read THE SUBVERSIVES in a fmz a few weeks before, incidentally—by a different author in different and somewhat better terms. Peon was the zine). THE FIRST SPACEMAN (witty). THE HELLFLOWER. This is without exception the finest work by GeOSmith I have yet seen. I didn't think he was capable of credible dialogue and consistent plot-writing. Let's hope this means he's getting someplace at last. TAKE A SEAT. ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD.

But oh Sam! I now take the '52 zines and change them for the '51 issues corresponding. This, of course, is an impossibility, because SS is now a monthly; but I'll do my best.

[*Turn page*]

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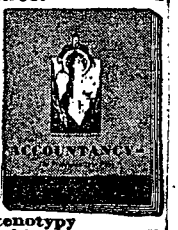

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SS January: '52 wins hands down, of course. This was what made me so optimistic about your stay. In March, however, you had that excellent Bracketttale—probably her best—STARMEN OF LLYRIDS and star shorts from St. Claire and Vance (MEN OF THE TEN BOOKS.) May showed Pratt's first and best novel for you—THE SEED FROM SPACE and not only a delightfully mad Lee tale—LETTERS OF FIRE—but also the best of the Cap Future tales. Further there was Wyndham's gem AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN, plus William's TAME ME THIS BEAST. And your bit of amusing nonsense too. (A TAXABLE DIMENSION.) This ish is easily the equal of the Jan. '52 ish. July: THE DARK TOWER is as remarkable for West as THE HELLFLOWER for Smith.

TWS February: brought good Vance and magnificent—in fact unparalleled—McDowell: clever shorts. April and THE CONTINENT MAKERS—de Camp at his best. One jewel of a short—I'M A STRANGER MYSELF. June and brilliant Vance; with Fyfe and Sprague-Merwin once more on the supporting team. And in August EARTHLIGHT; ALARM REACTION, the best thing Jones has done since THE TOYMAKER. Tenn and James had superb shorts.

Sam, up with whatever you wear instead of sox, or your sox, of course, according to your taste. Weight for weight, corresponding issues of your pubs are very light on the '52 side. Let's see the new outside bring a renewed improvement inside, as well.

In hope, Sam, we won't desert you.—*Highlands, Woodcote, Reading, U.K.*

To embattled fen who would like to know howcome Brunner rates in getting several thousand story ratings left in his letter while theirs are cut out—and in such a critical letter too— leave us explain.

These are not haphazard story ratings but a very detailed comparison for the purpose of making a very specific point. Moreover, though his conclusion is not particularily flattering, the very fact that he would go to all this trouble is evidence enough that TWS is dearer to that hunk of crystalline carbon he calls a heart than he is lightly to admit. And still further, we allowed the comparisons in detail because we wanted to analyze *them* and see if from their pattern we could arrive at some approximation of Mr. Brunner's taste.

The result is a little baffling, as it so often is. Let us clear the ground by openly granting the obvious fact that every editor prints what he knows to be bad stories from time to time. There are many reasons. He has space he *must* fill and simply cannot get enough good stories; he feels it is more important to keep a good author working than to destroy his confidence by slapping him down as soon as he turns in a job that is not his very best—and so on. So the editor has a very clear idea (on the whole clearer than most of his readers, since this is what he is *hired* for) as to which stories are good and which are bad.

With this in mind it is obvious to all editors that readers are divided into a number of classes. There are some who are uncritical enthusiasts—who like everything. There are some who are extremely difficult to satisfy, who are intensely critical on an intellectual plane. And there are some who are interested only in the science fiction *ideas* of a story and give not a solitary rap about the quality of the writing, the dialogue, good or bad, the characterization or the general effectiveness and convincingness of a story.

If said story has a gimmick which captures their imaginations, it can be the worst story in the world, they are for it.

Not too many readers balance all these factors and add a genuine appreciation of the author's ability as a *writer.*

Now Mr. Brunner dismisses WELL OF THE WORLDS as competently written, but a nonsensical fantasy. This should indicate that Kuttner's truly magnificent talent passed completely over his head—that he was insensitive to the enormous difficulties of making such a tenuous story vivid and colorful—that he tried the story simply on the basis of *idea* and from his viewpoint found it wanting.

But this would be too simple a judgement of Mr. Brunner. For in the sum total of his judgements he picks both good and bad stories indiscriminately to like. He lands unerringly on many which I consider dull and raves about them. He also picks others, like STARMEN OF LLYRDIS, which were undeniably brilliant, and seems to appreciate that fact. Our friend Brunner therefore, makes up rather a complex case of erratic tastes—here appreciating literary value, there oblivious to it; here going overboard for sheer *idea;* there captivated by a really trivial idea and for some strange reason highly enthusiastic about very mediocre writing.

There is hope for John Brunner, however. He ran across THE LOVERS in SS and he didn't exactly go overboard for it, in his usual style he said: "I do not personally consider it a classic, or even very good." But then he added:

"The other day I made my first sale to America—a long novelet. Not to you, but to aSF. It paid me six hundred thirty dollars. I would gladly have traded not only that, but my entire literary output to date for the privilege of having written THE LOVERS . . ."

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Times' run out again. And, as always, letters are left. Roy Tackett, for example, of 2022 Orchard Ave., Ogden, Utah, takes umbrage at our remark about "cold, dry cerebral stories" and says we can't have too many of them. We didn't sneer at the type, Roy, we like it in moderation, we gave it credit for lifting stf by the bootstraps, but we believe it will largely move over for a warmer, more human type of story now.

Arthur Hayes, of Matachewan, Ontario wants to know why mines are always plural and why magazines can't be put out on micro-film. You tell him, the idea stuns me. Bob Read of 618 Elbon Ave., Akron 6, Ohio, didn't like GADGET HAD A GHOST, the June cover or practically anything else but TRS. Is grumpily waiting for a good issue. Better write and tell us when you hit one, Bob, so we'll know.

Calvin Thos. Beck of Elmhurst complains he is being left out of too many letter columns—know what happens when you type on both sides of the paper, Cal? I have to retype them for the printer. Lynn Parsons of 5003 Wirt St., Omaha, Nebr. thinks Jack Vance must be a schizo because CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS was a "drab" tale and KOKOD WARRIORS was such good fun. Also thought FOOL'S ERRAND was in a class by itself and wants more age correspondents.

[illegible] Kaufman of 1 Water St., Newburgh

[*Turn page*]

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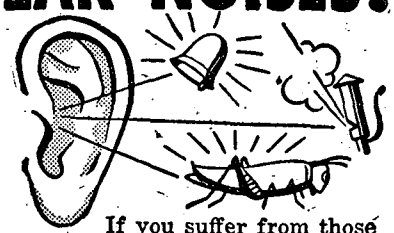

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waxes embarressedly complimentary, insists we have waged miracles with TWS and SS (Brunner, are you listening?) R. V. Bru (I think) wants to start a fan club in Havana and asks interested fen to write him at Ave. Central No. 18, Reparto Kohly, Marianao, Cuba, also wants correspondents from Pennsylvania and Florida, female preferred. Sorry, we can't sell you an original cover painting. Maybe Paul Orban can. Jane Miller, of Seaside, Oregon, wonders about Hubbard and whether Blish was being too hard on him.

Bill Walker of 305 Main St., Watsontown, Penn., can't quite buy FOOL'S ERRAND, wonders if a flood of controversy has risen from it. (Surprisingly, it hasn't.) M. Lee Rhines, who describes herself as "an Irish female teenager fan," likes us; her address is Rt. 1, Alger, Mich. Richard Harter, the Happy Hack has moved to Conally Hall, School of Mines and Technology, Rapid City, South Dakota and threatens to write some stories. Sylvia Kinder, of 143 Wabash St., San Bernardino, Calif. is organizing a fan club in that town. William E. Bodie of Box 134 Idanha, Oregon, sends us his very first fan letter. John T. Phillifent 13, Dancer Road, London, S.W. 6, England finds fault with LORDS OF THE MORNING and discusses "pure" science fiction.

Ronald D. Rentz announces the [illegible] of a Fantasy & Science-Fiction Book Club at 130 Vera Street, West Hartford 7, Conn. Fred Goetz announces the organization of TAPE-RESPONDENTS, INTERNATIONAL to exchange "talking letters" on tape with fans; write him at 3488-22nd St., San Francisco 10, Cal. James Gove, A/3c liked FOOL'S ERRAND and POLLUXIAN PRETENDER and both J. Martin Graetz and Bill Tuning got crowded out this trip; Ralph Packard had himself a bit of fun with the latest issue of "Thrilling Religion Stories"; and Lee Huddleston announces the formation of a Texas Science Fiction Census League to enumerate the fen of Texas. Write him at Rt. 1, Baird, Texas.

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—The Editor

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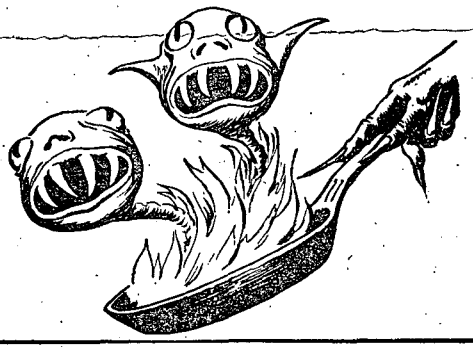

A Commentary on Fandom

CAME back from lunch the other day with (I am told) an eager-beaver look on my face. "Hey, Sam," I called.

"Yeah?" from Sam's paper-laden desk.

"Think I'll suggest that some fan-editor run a column in his 'zine called 'The Prying Fan.' Terrific . . . just thought of it!"

"Maybe *you* just thought of it, lunkhead. But some fan beat you to it . . . years ago."

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

"Oh."

* * * * *

My complete run of *Unknown Worlds* has been cruelly treated by my four-month-old kitten, in a manner which will wring screams of empathy from those of you who collect. The magazines stand on the floor in a hallway, and said beast has discovered that they are just ginger-peachy for sharpening her greasy little claws on. Result: torn and tattered backstraps.

Gives a little gray body.

* * * * *

Three fans dropped into the office and used our desks for a wailing wall. Their plea, which was that we put out a Captain Future anthology, was supplemented by the following proposition: they'd write all the stories, and we wouldn't have to pay them . . . just run the yarns under their bylines.

Down, fellows, down. Play dead. Come to think of it, don't play.

* * * * *

Walter Kubilius dropped in the same day, to pick up an illo which appeared with one of his stories. He and I went down to the stockroom, took a deep breath, and dived head-first into the shelves upon shelves of musty manu-

[*Turn page*]

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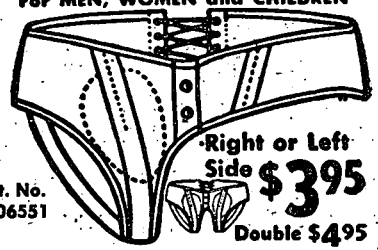

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scripts, old paintings, old illustrations, back-numbers, office equipment old and new, and motionless stock-room boys (who have not been known to move to any purpose since 1946, and are suspected by some to be dead; it's difficult to tell).

Unfortunately, we could not turn up the illustration Walter desired . . . probably went to the Chicago convention.

However, way in the back of the stock-room, way up on a shelf near the ceiling, wedged in between yellow stacks of COLLEGE HUMOR and THRILLING ADVENTURES, festooned with cobwebs and sleeping bats, was a mysterious package labeled: SCIENCE FICTION PAINTINGS. . . .

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Boy, are the conventions gonna love *us!*

* * * * *

The rumors one hears about next year's convention in Philly are fascinating. Appears that a do-or-die effort is being made to line up a shindig that won't look pale beside memories of Chicago. Quite a challenge . . . but Rothman, Train & Co. have good hands, and the task is, we'll bet, safe in them. More power.

* * * * *

I understand that one result of the Chicago convention is a rampant rumor that I am Sam Mines' son.

This is not exactly true.

Sam Mines is *my* son.

And he has found a soft spot for his poor old daddy to make a buck in his declining years.

This last year I made *twenty-three cents* of that buck!

* * * * *

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I. Halliday
Willowdale, Ontario, Can."

Glad you enjoyed "Journey to Barkut" . . . and have you looked under you recently?

—JEROME BIXBY

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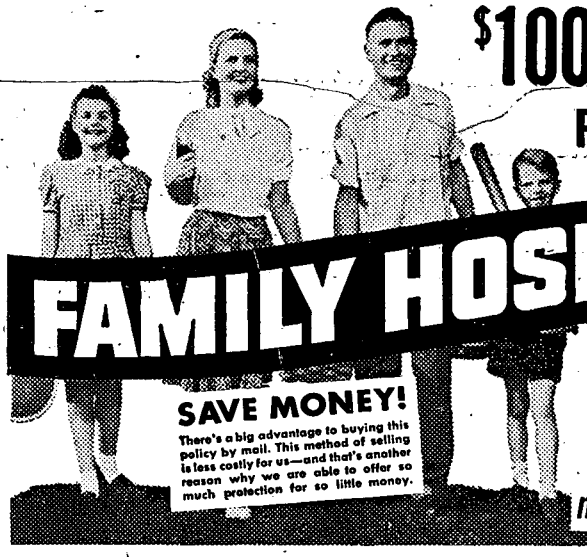

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THE SERVICE LIFE FAMILY HOSPITAL PLAN

SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

Assets of $12,700,000 as of January 1, 1952

Hospital Department M-17, Omaha 2, Nebraska

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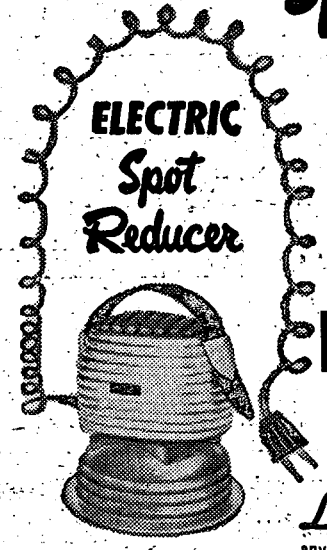
Reducing Specialist Says:

LOSE WEIGHT Where It Shows Most REDUCE MOST ANY PART OF THE BODY WITH

UNDERWRITERS LABORATORY APPROVED

Spot Reducer

Relaxing • Soothing
Penetrating Massage



PLUG IN—
GRASP
HANDLE
AND
APPLY

FOR GREATEST BENEFIT IN REDUCING by massage use Spot REDUCER with or without electricity—Also used as an aid in the relief of pains for which massage is indicated.

TAKE OFF EXCESS WEIGHT!

Don't Stay FAT—You Can Lose POUNDS and INCHES SAFELY

Without Risking HEALTH

Take pounds off — keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—MASSAGE!

LIKE a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body where it is loose and flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercise or strict diets. No steambaths, drugs or laxatives.

With the SPOT REDUCER you can now enjoy the benefits of RELAXING, SOOTHING massage in the privacy of your own home! Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle and apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms, buttocks, etc. The relaxing, soothing massage breaks down FATTY TISSUES, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat—helps you regain and keep a firmer and more GRACEFUL FIGURE!

Your Own Private Masseur at Home

When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home. It's fun reducing this way! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also aids in the relief of those types of aches and pains—and tired nerves that can be helped by massage! The Spot Reducer is handsomely made of light weight aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. AC 110 volts. Underwriters laboratory approved.

TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only $1 for your Spot Reducer on approval. Pay postman $8.95 plus delivery—or send $9.95 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it for ten days in your own home. Then if not delighted return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of FAT. MAIL COUPON now!

MAIL THIS 10 DAY FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!

ALSO USE IT FOR ACHES AND PAINS

CAN'T SLEEP

Relax with electric Spot Reducer. See how soothing its gentle massage can be. Helps you sleep when massage can be of benefit.

MUSCULAR ACHES:

A handy helper for transient relief of discomforts that can be aided by gentle, relaxing massage.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

USED BY EXPERTS

Thousands have lost weight this way—in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, necks, buttocks, etc. The same method used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The Spot Reducer can be used in your spare time. In the privacy of your own room.

ORDER IT TODAY

SENT ON APPROVAL—MAIL COUPON NOW!

SPOT REDUCER CO., Dept. B-339

318 Market St., Newark, New Jersey

Please send me the Spot Reducer for 10 days trial period. I enclose $1. Upon arrival I will pay postman only $8.95 plus postage and handling. If not delighted I may return SPOT REDUCER within 10 days for prompt refund of full purchase price.

☐ I enclose $12.95. Send DeLuxe Model.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... *State* .....

☐ SAVE POSTAGE — check here if you enclose $9.95 with coupon. We pay all postage and handling charges. Same money back guarantee applies. ☐ I enclose $12.95. Send DeLuxe Model.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

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